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I watched him circling round me.

FRONTISPIECE.

P. 17.



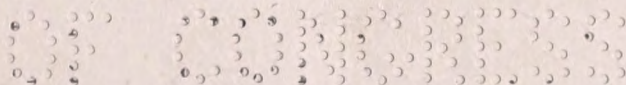
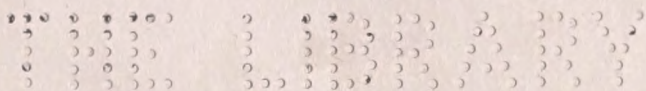
# KING FOR A SUMMER

A STORY OF CORSICAN LIFE  
AND ADVENTURE

BY

EDGAR PICKERING

ILLUSTRATED BY WARWICK GOBLE



BOSTON  
LEE AND SHEPARD

1902

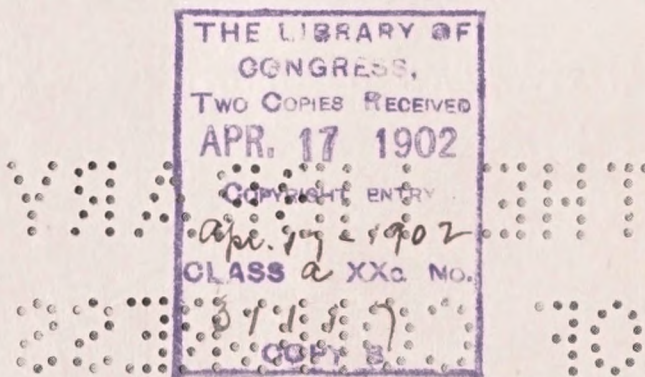


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*Published April, 1902.*

KING FOR A SUMMER.



Norwood Press :  
Berwick & Smith, Norwood, Mass., U.S.A.

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# *King for a Summer.*

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## CHAPTER I.

### MY MOUNTAIN HOME.

**M**Y favourite spot in the grim old house built in the shape of a great square tower, was a little room just beneath the pointed roof, having a window from which one could catch a glimpse of Ajaccio lying miles away. Down below the window, for the house was high amongst the mountains, were vineyards and olive-grounds, with here and there a great fan palm marking itself out plainly from among the brown-black cypresses and other trees that grew almost up to the house.

The ascent to this was steep and narrow, leading to the high flight of steps that gave entrance to the building, and although the land surrounding it had once been cultivated, for two years or longer it had been left to itself and become overgrown with weeds and ground ivy. There were some out-buildings, but these had fallen to ruin, and all the life or movement there was, lay within the house, although that was little enough, for my cousin Fabiani Brasco was morose and silent, who kept himself like a prisoner



and paid but little heed to my presence. He was a big, strong man, with grizzled curly hair that reached his shoulders, and walked with a limp, having a bullet in his thigh, put there, so Teodor told me, by one of the Arrighi.

Teodor was my cousin's son, and a year older than I, big like his father and fierce as a watch dog. We were not friends, through no fault of mine, however, and it would have taken little to have made us enemies, relations though we were. Teodor had a lofty overbearing way with him, being insolent upon the slightest opposition to his vain-glorious talk, and proud as a Genoese noble, boasting of his descent from the old *signori* of Corsica, as indeed I might have done, if it had been worth doing. My father had been one of the richest men in Bastia, so I had heard, but he died when I was a child, and Fabiani Brasco brought me to the home amongst the mountains, where it stood gaunt and solitary, like the fragment of some great castle that had crumbled away, and here for seven years I had lived, seeing and knowing very little more of the world than could be discovered from the window of the little room I have already mentioned.

What I did know, however, was that between the Brascos and the Arrighis a deadly feud existed, being a *parentado* <sup>1</sup> on my cousin's side at least, and that it was for this reason the land remained un-

<sup>1</sup> An alliance of relatives with the quarrel, who are included in the *Vendetta*.



cultivated, and the lower windows of the house were kept barricaded with straw mattresses, having loopholes through which an enemy could be seen and shot at easily. It was not a very uncommon state for a house to be placed in, being called "*inceppar le fenestre*," and in our case it had lasted so long that we were quite accustomed to the gloom which it made in the rooms. We were in a real fortress, for the only entrance to the house was by the steep flight of steps and these not even an Arrighi dare climb; but two years had gone by since Fabiani Brasco ventured down them last, and those who did so were always heavily armed and on the watch against a surprise. It would have been certain death had either he or Teodor worked in the fields, and it was almost as dangerous for Fabiani's workmen. The last man he had employed never returned to be paid his wages, and it was three months before his bones were found, picked clean by the eagles.

How the *Vendetta* began I know not, but it had lasted longer than Teodor could recollect, who was eighteen, and the quarrel had gone on until only my cousin Fabiani remained alive of four brothers, and he, as I have said, was crippled by a shot from his enemy Cesario Arrighi. Teodor tried to make the quarrel plain to me, but although I was a relative—my name was Camilla Negroni—I could never quite understand my share in it. He it was who called it *Vendetta parentado* and said



Cesario Arrighi was as much my enemy as Fabiani's and his own, and that I was to shoot him and any of his friends I might chance to encounter. However, I had never seen the Arrighi, and cared nothing for him, neither could I get myself to hate him nor thirst for his blood. But I kept these thoughts to myself, not wishing to be considered other than friendly to my cousin's family of whom I knew no others beside Fabiani and his son. It seemed a very long time since I had lived in Bastia, where my father died, who had been a trader, going to and fro to foreign countries, and was, as I say, reckoned one of the richest men in those parts. Fabiani, who came to my father's funeral, took charge of me afterwards, and from that time I had lived with him in his lonely old house amongst the mountains. Now and again some of his kindred came to us, and we were regularly supplied with provisions, whilst Teodor and I were free to go in and out as we chose, although we rarely left the house, for there was no telling who might be on the watch for us, and a bullet flies very swiftly. It was a state of siege in fact, and I have heard of men being kept prisoners, as was Fabiani, for ten or twelve years, and these when the fear of their enemy had grown old and dim, had ventured out to find death still waiting for them. Paulina—she was our servant, old and tottering—said that a Corsican's revenge never sleeps, and that a Corsican never forgets.

It was from old Paulina that I learnt something



about myself and a good deal more about my cousin. She it was who spoke about my dead father's riches which would be mine some day—it Signor Brasco permitted, added Paulina, shrugging her shoulders for a reason I was to discover later on—and how that my cousin had lost a great deal of money in the year 1729 when Corsica revolted against its Genoese rulers. The house amongst the mountains was the only property remaining to Fabiani, and Teodor would have very little to inherit when his father died, she told me.

I cannot say that Paulina's talk interested me; she was a gossiping old woman, brown and shrivelled like a dried olive, and Teodor was for ever speaking about the war which we in the hills saw nothing of, hearing the faint rumble of it only as it were from the conversation of the few people who came to visit us. Teodor was for shouldering his gun and marching away to battle, but of this my cousin would not hear.

"I have spent enough for my country," said Fabiani, "and can ill spare you, my son; so stay here with me, and let Camilla go if he will!" This he said one day that I remember very distinctly, because it was the one before the day my cousin went down the steep steps of his house, on his way to Ajaccio.

As I said, Fabiani had been kept prisoner in his own house for two years, and then came the time when he resolved to go into the town. I do not



know the reason he had for this, but it must have been a very strong reason to persuade him to risk his life. Teodor tried to hinder his father from going, but my cousin was so bent on making the journey that all his son's words were unavailing to prevent it. Paulina who came up to me in the little room from which the downward path and the road to Ajaccio could be seen easily, said that Fabiani's visit was upon his own business affairs and he had vowed that though a hundred of the Arrighi might beset the way he did not fear them. Paulina and I stood watching my cousin and Teodor as they went down the winding path through an olive grove, until presently they disappeared and I followed the old woman to the lower rooms, which, as I have described, were always gloomy even at noon-day, because of the thick mattresses of straw before the windows, but I never knew the dullness and dimness affect me as they did that morning. There was nothing to do, nor anyone to speak to except Paulina, whom I could hear grumbling to herself in the underground room where our meals were cooked. I knew from the manner in which she moved the big copper stewpan as though dashing it on the table, that her mind was ill at ease, and then a sudden resolution came over me, to quit the house and go down that winding path through the olive grove—to go further away from the house than I had before gone, to go as far as Ajaccio even—it was but a few miles off—as I had



longed to do many a time when I stood gazing out on the world from the little window.

Fabiani and Teodor had been gone half an hour maybe, when I decided upon following them; and without a thought of danger I made my way down the path. The last thing in my mind was Fabiani's *vendetta parentado* as I went swiftly beneath the big chestnut trees and through the cool green thickets on my road to Ajaccio, and a feeling of freedom added a delight to the journey. The sun shone brightly and a soft breeze stirred the leaves into a sort of music that was very pleasant to hear, and except for an eagle that was soaring high in the blue sky, not a sight of any living creature was there. Down the rocky path I went, eager to join Fabiani and Teodor before they reached Ajaccio, if possible, when suddenly there came on the air the sound of firearms. Once—twice—the report of a gun rang out, together with a cry such as I had never heard before, and I found myself holding my breath in eager expectation as I tried to peer through the thick foliage that hid the valley.



## CHAPTER II.

### THE QUARREL.

FOR a moment I remained thus, and then ran to where a turn in the road gave me a view below, from whence came a little cloud of smoke out of a thicket, and the sound of voices, amongst them Teodor's loud and shrill. I was listening to this when from the trees that were not a hundred yards away, the tall figure of a man sprang out, who stood levelling his gun in the direction of Ajaccio downward, whilst at the same moment another man came rushing towards him. There was a sharp report and the man who had been running, dropped on his knees, rolling over before he lay motionless with his face to the sun, and then two other men had closed upon the tall figure, coming unexpectedly from either side of the path, and one of them had a big vine-knife in his hand.

I saw the broad blade flash in the light, and the tall figure seemed to quiver for a moment, but the fellow was so quick in his movements and strong that he had twisted himself free from the attack and sent one of the assailants sprawling on the path,





The tall figure of a man sprang out.







before being seized again, and a struggle, fierce as of wild beasts, began between him and his remaining foe. I saw him stagger once or twice, for the blood was pouring from a wound in his leg made by the vine-knife, and his grasp was on the throat of his foe, when there came staggering up the pebbly road my cousin Fabiani who leant on Teodor's arm heavily.

Fabiani's face was blood-stained—that I saw at a glance—but there was no time to look at him again, for the deadly struggle between the two men had brought them close to me. With quick-coming throbs of breath, and faces pale with passion, they fought and wrestled, the taller of the men becoming quickly weakened. Try as he might, that wound in his leg gave his opponent the advantage, and with a stumbling movement the wounded man fell to his knees—leaving his broad chest exposed to the dagger that was uplifted. Another instant and the weapon would have decided the fight, but I had run forward, and putting all my strength in the blow, sent the murderous fellow backward.

There was a sharp descent from the edge of the path at this point, hidden by bushes; and through these downward—I cannot say how far the man fell, but I heard his shout of rage from a great depth—went he and his dagger, and I turned to his wounded foe who sat on the path, with a laugh on his handsome face.

“I owe you my life,” he exclaimed, getting himself upright with an awkward spring. “Tell me your name.”



"Camilla Negroni."

"I shall remember that always—and that you have saved me from death: I will repay you some day—never doubt that"—and maybe we should have said more to each other, if he had not vanished from sight amidst the trees, for Teodor with his father leaning on his arm was beside me.

"What have you done?" cried Teodor, furiously, his face aflame with anger. "Why have you let that assassin escape? help me to carry my father to the house—he is wounded and like to die of his hurt."

I glanced at Fabiani who was scowling beneath the blood which dyed his brow and cheeks, and was a good deal relieved, for there was no sign of death about him. He was badly wounded, however, a part of one ear had been shot away and the bullet had grazed through his curly hair, but the injury was not deadly. Fabiani was too full of rage and fury to die just then I reckoned, and the manner of his gripping my arm which I held out for his support, assured me of this.

"You have aided my bitterest enemy," he ground out between his teeth. "He who has kept me like a caged bird these two years, and who was in my grasp. We were five to one; and he escaped—it was through you, Camilla Negroni, that he has been snatched from my hand."

"He would have been killed, if I had not sent that fellow through the bushes," I replied, almost



as angrily as Fabiani had spoken. "He was wounded, too, and had fought bravely."

"But do you know who the fellow is?" cried Teodor, giving me another furious look over Fabiani's shoulder as we went slowly up the path. "You, Camilla Negroni, of our own blood that you are, have saved the enemy of your family. It is Cesario Arrighi that you befriended. Think of it," and his eyes shot out an angry flash.

"Cesario Arrighi!" That made me think indeed, as Teodor had said, and I understood very easily what had happened. Fabiani had been attacked, as Paulina had prophesied, and the three men, two of whom were lying on the path and the third of whom was somewhere in the direction of Ajaccio, had come to his assistance against Cesario. Yes, it was plain enough, and also that I, a sharer according to Teodor in the *vendetta parentado*, had aided our bitterest enemy to escape. That was something more to think of as we three went toiling up to the narrow flight of steps of our besieged house.

Not another word was said until we were behind the bolted door, but then Fabiani's anger burst out again upon me.

"It is through you," he cried, "that Cesario is yet alive, and able to harm us further. See—my business has been prevented in being done; I should have been well on the way to Ajaccio had Cesario not encountered me!" And Fabiani was raging thus when Paulina stopped him. He seemed to



have forgotten his wounded ear, and so had Teodor who stood frowning at me; but in spite of him and my cousin I could not feel sorry for what I had done. Nay I felt very glad that Cesario had not fallen beneath that murderous dagger, and that I had helped him to escape, but it was clear that Teodor was my enemy from that day.

Paulina forced Fabiani into a chair and began dressing his wound, making him groan once or twice, for her hand was heavy, and Teodor went striding out of the room.

I had no wish for further talk with Fabiani, who at the best of times was harsh and sneering in his manner, so I left him also, and for the remainder of that day kept out of my cousin's sight. There was no one to talk with except Paulina, and from her I heard the full account of the morning's adventure.

It was just as Fabiani and his son had reached the broad road leading to Ajaccio, that a shot came whizzing past his ear, and then before he could hide himself in a thicket, another bullet had cut half his ear off, and Teodor had given the cry I heard. There were three men at work hard by the spot, and these came running to my cousin, who promised them a good reward if they killed or captured his assailant. This they promised to do, and the readier were they seeing that a price was set on Cesario Arrighi's head, he being outlawed; and the rest of the story I have already told.



"Fabiani," went on Paulina, "says that it is you, Camilla Negroni, who prevented Cesario from being taken; and let me tell you that you have acted foolishly. Not that Fabiani is any wiser, for 'twas only a month since that the message "*si preparasse*"<sup>1</sup> came. How it reached Fabiani's hand I know not, but he showed me the writing of it, and said he, 'Not all the Arrighi in Corsica shall hinder me from going to Ajaccio.' But there Fabiani proved himself untruthful, as you have seen," and Paulina gave one of her croaking laughs as she said this.

It had never been very cheerful in the house, but from the time of the adventure I have described, a gloomier cloud than usual rested over it and its inmates. Fabiani never spoke to me, being satisfied with his scowling rebuke, I suppose, but Teodor showed his enmity openly. He would sneer and jeer at every friendly word I offered him, calling me a name under his breath so that I could not catch the meaning of it distinctly enough to resent it. I had no wish to quarrel, however, for all that I had done was but to have saved a wounded man's life; yet to be ever looked at in scorn and resentment made me angry, although I restrained myself from showing my anger, until there came a day when Teodor's words and manner could be endured no longer.

We were alone, I remember, in the hot room that was shut out from the air and light by the

<sup>1</sup> Let him be prepared.



great bulging mattress of straw which covered the window, but I could see his sneering face from the further end of the room amongst the shadows. Fabiani had gone to his bed to rest his wounded head which Paulina had bandaged afresh that morning, and for some minutes neither Teodor nor I had spoken. Then he said something, which set my blood boiling. He spoke it, in a tone as though to himself, but I knew he meant the words for me.

"There was a man once," said Teodor softly, "who lost his bravery, and delayed to avenge himself upon his enemy. Who was willing to bear insult, and would listen unmoved when one said '*rimbecco*'<sup>1</sup> of him," and when Teodor muttered that I felt my fingers tingling to choke the horrible word back into his throat, but I made as though I had not heard, and this prompted Teodor to call me by my name as if I had been a stranger to him.

"Signor Negroni," he said aloud. "You find this home unpleasant to live in maybe?"

"The house is well enough," I replied, as carelessly as I could.

"So that it is these who are with you, whom you dislike—that is so?"

"I have not thought of that—yet," I answered. "It is to come, perhaps."

"Nay, but it has come to me, Camilla Negroni,"

<sup>1</sup> To use this word, which is to reproach for not revenging an insult, was forbidden by the old Genoese law in Corsica, as provoking bloodshed, and was punished by a fine, or public flogging.



he cried, starting to his feet, and I thought he would have used that hateful word again, which he whispered a moment before; but that I think Teodor, fierce as he looked, was not brave enough to do to my face. "It is the sight of my father's wound, that he owes to you; the thought that it is to you Cesario Arrighi is indebted for his life, and that you have proved a traitor to your family, which makes this house unbearable to me so long as you are in it."

"It is for Fabiani to send me away," I retorted, "you have no power here. And as for his wound, he owes nothing to me for it, so in saying that you have told a lie, Teodor Brasco."

I daresay my answer angered him, but I was beyond myself with passion. I had been unjustly blamed and treated with scorn for no cause of my own.

"I have power enough to make you repent of saying that I lied," he exclaimed. "It is easy to talk thus while we are in this room, but you would not dare to do so if you and I were alone, Camilla Negroni, under the open sky, with none to interrupt us."

"I will say that you did lie, wherever I may be. Fabiani's wound was given him before Arrighi met me."

Teodor became suddenly quite calm in his manner, and he looked at me meaningly when I had said this.

"It is not a pleasant thing to be thought a coward,"



he answered, nodding his head gravely, "therefore, Camilla, you shall have the opportunity of proving that you are not one. Come to me presently, where the orange wood begins—we shall not be seen, believe me."

I understood what he meant—it did not require that Teodor should take down from the wall of the room one of the large knives that hung there with some other weapons, nor that he should flourish it before me. He had invited me to the *Duello* and unless I were indeed the coward he had called me I must consent to fight him. There was no other method of settling a quarrel that I had ever heard of, and even brothers fought together, let alone relatives closer connected with each other than were Teodor and myself. I had the satisfaction of knowing that the quarrel was none of my seeking moreover, and in response to the invitation I made a gesture with my head, whereupon with a lofty air Teodor went out of the room; and I, having waited for some little time, took another of the knives and followed him to where, at a distance of about a quarter of a mile from the house, the wood began, that had a broad patch of bare rock at its entrance.

I recollect even now, the solemn stillness there was when we came face to face, and the evil look in Teodor's eyes, as he stood holding his knife hand behind his back, creeping in a little circle round me to find an opening for his attack.



## CHAPTER III.

### THE DUEL.

**I** SUPPOSE my blood was as hot as Teodor's, even if I showed less anger, and for a few seconds I watched him circling round me, preparing himself for a spring, with a longing for revenge such as I had never felt before. If I had not heard him whisper that word, maybe my anger would have been less; but he had called me "coward" also, and that reproach must be wiped out even if it needed his blood to do it; and I watched with eyes that saw only his stealthy movements which brought him closer and closer to where I remained standing with bent body, on my guard.

Nearer and nearer he came, until with a fierce stab his knife shot out, and I had parried the blow which went past my side, drawing myself backward a pace as I did this, and he laughed with a hiss. Then before I could guard myself, he had leaped forward and his knife went deep into my arm, making a cut which was as though a flame had touched me. It was my left arm, however, or the fight would have been sooner ended, and I threw



myself against him before he could recover a firm footing, stooping a little, so that my knife blade made a long scratch—it was no more I am convinced—in his thigh. I did this, that I might disable him quickly and by so doing prevent worse coming of the duel. I had no thought of slaying him, angry as I was, and would have been well content in proving myself as brave as he; but Teodor was otherwise minded I suppose, for with a yell of fury he was upon me again, dealing blows that it needed all my power to withstand, and all my good fortune to escape alive from. I knew that I was stabbed more than once, and my hot blood was pouring from a cut in my shoulder; and that Teodor had not escaped I knew also, for my knife had a redness on it as it flashed in the sun.

I had lost all my calmness now, and was conscious of nothing but the sight of my desperate enemy as we struggled to and fro, that sunny day. Now Teodor had drawn apart from me for an instant, and then we were closely locked again, and suddenly it seemed that I was alone, panting and faint, for Teodor had fallen with his face hidden by his outstretched arm, and the knife, clenched still in his hand, had thrust with such force as to shiver the blade against the rocky ground. And when I saw this a great flood of remorse came over me; I forgot his sneers and taunts, only remembering that Teodor had been my kinsman; and running forward I turned him on his side. He was not



dead, but a deep groan escaped him as he looked at me, and then his eyes closed, as if death had seized him; whereupon I gave a cry of alarm, and as though in answer to it, a man was standing at my side, and glancing up I recognised Cesario Arrighi.

"I was amongst the trees when you fought," he said. "This is Fabiani Brasco's son, by the sight of his face."

"He forced the quarrel on me," I cried. "He is hurt, you see. We must get him to the house."

"I doubt if he is likely to be much the worse for his fight," replied Cesario composedly. "He has fainted from loss of blood, and will recover himself presently. Help me to bandage this wound which is the worst of his hurts, and then we may leave him to get to his house by himself. His condition is not so dangerous as yours."

"But I am only scratched," I replied, "and Teodor has——"

"Your life will not be safe for an hour when Fabiani discovers this," said Cesario, binding Teodor's wound skilfully the while. "I know him better than you do. He will never forgive what you have done—neither this nor that service you rendered me some days ago."

"Fabiani has scarcely spoken to me since," I replied, "and Teodor calls me 'coward.' We fought because of what I have done."

Cesario gave a little laugh and got up from the



ground. "It is as I said," he continued, "Fabiani will find a way of ridding himself of you—it would not be the first he has sent into silence—I know Fabiani Brasco well enough to say that, and here is another reason why he should compass your death."

Teodor had opened his eyes again by this time and Cesario took me aside.

"Come with me," he said. "You will find that I am not ungrateful for your saving my life. It is yours now which is in danger, and you must get far away from this spot before the alarm is given. Look there"—and Cesario pointed in the direction of the house—"see those men whom Fabiani has hired to capture me. Your answer—give it quickly—you will find I have not warned you without a good reason."

There was no time to pause and think, for as Cesario said this I saw three or four men coming toward us, and a shot from a gun went screaming by me. Cesario was already on his way to the wood, going lamely through his recent hurt, and with a glance behind I followed him, leaving Teodor gazing after me as he rested himself upon his hands for a moment. And that was the last I had of him for many a day, and it was a longer time still before I set foot in my cousin's house again or spoke to him. It was the first, too, of a life full of adventures and dangers, which began at the moment when with the fierce cries of our pursuers behind us I ran with Cesario Arrighi into the wood.



I caught him up before we reached the opening amongst the trees, and when we were well hidden by these Cesario stopped and looked me straightly in the face. It was not until this moment that I had marked him closely, but when I did so a great liking for him came over me. Cesario was a handsome man, a good many years older than I, ten or twelve maybe, and there was a pleasant smile in his brown eyes. He was tall and straight in figure, with the look of strength which can never be hidden, and there was a merry ring in his voice. I lost the recollection of the *Vendetta* between him and my cousin as Cesario spoke to me, and it was not many minutes before we were on the friendliest terms.

"They have missed a rare prize this morning," he laughed, jerking his head backward, "for I am worth more money to other people, than I ever was to myself, Camilla."

"But are you certain it was you whom they wished to capture?" I asked; and then Cesario turned a glance that was half serious and half merry, on me.

"Listen," said he, "there is not a man more sought after in all Corsica than I. There is a price on my head—likely enough Fabiani has told you that already—and more than once that money has been nearly earned. Three years now I have lived amongst the mountains, going into the town at the peril of my life, but yet going whenever I had occasion to. You must understand that I have a



relative in Ajaccio, better known as Nasone<sup>1</sup> than by his true name, which is Emanuel Matra, and it is from him that I know of the blood money that is to be won by killing or capturing me."

"But why is this?" I asked as we went through the dense wood, Cesario going as though the way were well known to him. "What have you done?"

Cesario shrugged his shoulders and thought a moment before answering.

"It is a long story," he said at last, "and has a beginning at the time when I was a boy, before living in Ajaccio with my mother—may she rest in peace," and Cesario made the sign of the cross on his breast reverently. "She and I lived in a little house, that Nasone lent us without rent, for my mother was poor, and widowed. I have a clear memory of my father, and of the small farm which he cultivated. He was a handsomer man than I, Camilla, big and strong, who would have faced Fabiani Brasco and his three brothers boldly in fair fight," and the speaker's face turned fierce and red as he came to this point in his story.

"There was a feud between us—we Arrighis and the Brascos—they had done my father a great injury and he vowed revenge—it was Clementi Brasco who set fire to my father's little granary and slaughtered two of our horses. It was Pasquele Brasco who sought my father's life more than once, and it was Fabiani Brascò who broke the oath of reconciliation

<sup>1</sup> A nickname, meaning "large nose."



which the *parolanti*<sup>1</sup> had imposed. But now only Fabiani remains alive."

We walked on in silence for a time when Cesario had told me his history thus far, and then he stopped abruptly, opening the breast of his coat, showing me a morsel of bloodstained linen fastened to his shirt.

"You see this," he said, touching the piece of linen; "it was from my father's dress, after he had been murdered, and my mother pinned it on my breast. He had been found slain just beyond the olive grove which formed part of our farm, and the man who did the deed was Fabiani Brasco. There were no tears in my mother's eyes when she bade me revenge my father's murder, and I have obeyed her. But Fabiani had committed his crime so secretly that there was no hope of the law touching him, nor did I wish that it should. I had to wait, however, wait until years had gone past wherein my mother became poor and at length died of her sorrow. That is three years ago, and it is just three years since my first chance of revenge came. Clementi Brasco had died and his brother Xavier, but Pasquele and Fabiani were alive and prosperous.

"One day I had walked from Ajaccio into the country, and it was at a little inn by the roadside that I saw Pasquele Brasco sitting with some friends at a table outside the house drinking. Nasone had

<sup>1</sup> Mediators, who interposed between hostile parties, in order to put an end to a quarrel, each party taking the oath of reconciliation.



told me that Pasquele had been in Italy, which was the cause of my not encountering him before, but the sight of him sent the blood tingling through my veins. He was laughing as I passed the inn, and at sight of me he laughed louder than before, sending a jeering word or two at me. Then I turned, facing him, and the next moment Pasquele had done with laughing for ever, going down in a heap under the table with a bullet from my gun through his head. Part of my revenge was satisfied."

"What happened after that?" I asked, giving a sidelong look at his resolute face.

"I had to flee for my life," he replied carelessly. "There was only one place of refuge, and that was amongst the mountains. I was banned by the law, which condemned me and set a price on my head—there was no means of earning my livelihood in Ajaccio as formerly, and one must live; so to the mountains I escaped, and there I have spent these three years. People choose to call me a 'Bandit,'"—and Cesario laughed once more.

"And it is in fear of you that Fabiani has been kept prisoner!" I exclaimed.

"You shall hear of that at a future time," replied Cesario. "I have something to tell you of Fabiani; and Nasone, whom you shall visit presently, will say more to you of your cousin."

He was silent again when he had said this, as side by side we quitted the shelter of the wood and began climbing the steep side of the mountain.



## CHAPTER IV.

### THE NOTARY OF CORTE.

**T**HE path was a toilsome one and we had gone beyond the trees, gaining a great height from whence a far-reaching space of country was to be seen. Far below lay a partly ruined town, the name of which I do not know, and a little from this I could make out the white roof of a house which Cesario told me was a deserted convent, a burying-place being close to it, the grave-stones peeping out from among the cypresses; and beyond lay the blue sea sparkling in the sunlight, with a fishing boat no bigger than my hand, as it seemed, lying on its glittering bosom. Above were the misty summits of the mountains, and out from their grey veil dropped a great vulture down into the valley; and as the bird sank from sight the silence and solitude became deeper.

Cesario had not spoken for some time, keeping his gaze before him to where a great mass of rock stood out, having a path round it that as I looked seemed scarcely broad enough for a wild sheep to traverse safely.



It was all strange to me, this view and the path I was travelling; and there was need for all my care in walking, for the way was over rolling stones and between bramble hedges, festoons of ivy and rank thistles, the bare rock sticking up here and there through these. It could not be called a path rightly, being scarcely a track, yet Cesario went along it without hesitation.

"You will get accustomed to places of this sort before long," he said, pointing to the narrow ledge round the rock; "keep close to the wall, and if your head is not of the strongest, keep your eyes there as well."

We were at the beginning of the narrow path I have described when he finished speaking, and I gave two glances at it, before venturing to follow him, as he, having slung his gun straight so that it might not impede his progress, went fearlessly on to the narrow shelf that was hardly wide enough for my feet to stand together. On the left hand was a precipice smooth as the side of a bottle, without a projection from where I stood to the bottom, which was many hundreds of feet off. The sun came striking against the grey wall, reflecting the glare into my face, and on the right side the great mountain side went soaring up until its top was lost in mist. Two glances then I gave, one at the precipice and another at Cesario who had walked onwards as unconcerned as though the road were broad as a carriage drive, and then I crept after



him, keeping my eyes to my right hand. Step by step I went with the rough rock well nigh grazing my cheek, so closely I hugged it, and at last reached the extremity of the point. The path had crumbled away here for a foot or wider, and I had to stretch forward, giving almost a leap to gain the other side; but it was done before I dared think of the danger, though it seemed as if all my breath went into that jump.

Round the corner of the projection, however, the path widened, until it joined the sloping mountain again, and Cesario gave a laugh when I joined him.

"You came round safely, you see," he exclaimed, "but it needed caution. There would be little risk of anyone passing to us, if we were minded to prevent them from where we stand. Two brave fellows, who were bent on capturing Serafino—you will see him and Massoni anon—came to the break in the path no longer ago than a month. It was when Serafino was bringing home a sheep that he had killed."

"What happened?" I asked.

"It was not much," he replied, shrugging his shoulders; "but one of those two brave fellows lies below there—unless they have found and buried him—and the other may be in Ajaccio still for aught I know. He ran that way, Serafino told me. No, I do not think it is by that path my enemies will come when they try to capture me, and there is only one other which leads to my dwelling-place."

When Cesario spoke of a dwelling-place I looked round, expecting to see a cottage or hut, but there



was nothing save the bare rock, nor trace of anything of life except our two selves. Great boulders that had rolled ages ago from above were strewn about, and a wilder, more desolate place I never yet had beheld. Up and down went the hard stony surface, Cesario leading the way, sometimes between great masses of the broken rock which gave a welcome shade, and now striding over their tops to where far off was a break in the mountain. I was tired and faint by this time, and I suppose he noticed this, for as we gained another great patch of shadow, he flung himself down, bidding me to do the same; and then from his sheepskin wallet Cesario drew a bottle of wine and some bread, which he broke in halves. I was famished and ate the bread eagerly, and the wine, which was richer than ever Fabiani provided for his household, tasted like nectar, bringing strength to my weary limbs. Then Cesario bound up my cut shoulder again, and when we had eaten I fell fast asleep, not waking until the sun was low in the sky and the valley had turned black.

"Come, Camilla," he exclaimed, looking toward the break in the mountainside. "We must get to my place of refuge before the darkness hides it. We are not far away now and if I do not mistake that is Serafino's voice I hear. If Serafino ever gets hanged it will be for possessing that voice of his, which is more like an ungreased cartwheel than anything else," he added.



I listened and heard a droning voice which had more strength than sweetness in it, but of the place of refuge there was no sign. Nothing but rock and rank herbage, growing dim and colourless in the waning light, were to be seen, and I went with Cesario looking out eagerly for his habitation, wondering of what sort it might be, and then suddenly we came upon a sight I shall not easily forget. It was just as we turned from a great mass of broken rock that a ruddy glare was seen and the sound of a gruff voice heard, chanting a song of which one line rings in my ears now, and was a kind of refrain to the song. "Eterna faremo vendetta," went the words, and then the shrill tone of a shepherd's pipe joined in, playing a quick tune, to which a lean figure danced and capered in the glare.

The fire was burning before the entrance to a cave, and over the flaming faggots was a spit with a piece of meat roasting. On one side of the entrance was a tall man who lay with his elbows on the ground, and played the pipe, and on the other side sat a short, thickset fellow, with the broadest, merriest face imaginable, and he it was who was lifting up his rusty voice, that was a roar when one came close to him. But it was the third figure which attracted my attention most, and Cesario burst into a roar of laughter as we stopped, watching the scene for a moment.

The capering fellow was thin and active, dressed in black, and having a great bushy wig, whereof



the long tail went flying to and fro with every movement of his body. His coat skirts fluttered in the wind and below them a pair of spindle legs twirled and twisted, and as he danced in the fire-light, he looked like some great bat hovering in the air. The pipe sent out its screeching notes, the fat fellow roared his song, and Cesario with a smile turned to me.

"The notary from Corte," he whispered. "He comes to us now and again. Look how Massoni is making him dance."

The player on the pipe whom he called Massoni stopped at this moment, having observed our arrival; and the notary giving a final leap, twisted himself, facing us. The other, whose name was Serafino, got up from the ground and a shout of welcome came out of his lusty throat.

"I thought you to have been visiting the chief magistrate at the least, Cesario," he exclaimed, "so long a time have you been away, Who is this you have brought with you?" and Serafino put a heavy hand on my shoulder.

"A friend," replied Cesario. "Call him Camilla, Serafino, and get your clumsy hand from his shoulder. The lad is wounded."

"Then I will cure him with a remedy that has never failed," replied the other, good-humouredly. "And Massoni shall get supper ready. Two visitors in one day, you perceive, Cesario."

During this conversation the thin man had stood



watching us, with his hands clasped before him, and there was a smirking smile on his lean face.

“Signor Cesario Arrighi,” he exclaimed, “I have the pleasure of beholding you once again. I have brought hither the papers of which you were in need, and all the news that I have gathered since we met last.”

Cesario nodded his head, and spoke aside to Massoni, who was kneeling beside the roasting meat; whilst the notary addressed me, holding out his skeleton-like fingers.

“A merry company,” he said in an undertone, giving a sweep of his hand round to the others. “You saw me dancing maybe. It was to please Massoni. I would not let my fellow-townsmen know of it for fifty florins. But here one may dance”—and he gave a cackling little laugh. Then Cesario joined us.

“I am glad you have come up to us to-day, Signor Poli,” he said, “I have been expecting you this week since. You have brought the sum of money that was asked for?”

“I have brought two news sheets no older than two and four months respectively,” replied Poli; “I have brought you every item of news that my mind could remember, and as to the sum of money—I could get no more than half the hundred florins you required—not so much as a *soldo* more.”

“That was the story you told us when last you came,” exclaimed Massoni from his place by the



spit. "You recollect how your memory grew when I held your lean body over the fire."

The notary gave a shudder, and began rubbing his calves, whereupon Serafino burst into a roaring laugh.

"Look you here, Signor Poli—otherwise called *Angellone*<sup>1</sup> by your townsmen," exclaimed Cesario; "a hundred florins I told you to bring, and a hundred florins I expect to receive."

"Signor Arrighi," whined the notary, "if you could but believe the danger and difficulty of collecting the *taglio*,<sup>2</sup> you would pity me. I have dogs set on me when I approach one house; I have a nest of vipers suddenly hissing at me from another—that is the one where Madame Clementina and her seven serving maidens reside; at the chief money-lender's in Corte, when I asked civilly for his contributions, I was like to be spitted as the meat yonder, by a dagger which he hurled at me, and finally, when I ventured into the laundry of the Frenchwoman Celeste Daubeney, a strapping wench from Gascony seized me in her grasp and flung me into a great trough of boiling soap-suds, as though I had been a piece of foul linen. And you ask me for a hundred florins, from such a desperate set of misers as those I have described."

"An excellent story," replied Cesario calmly; "if one believed it. And now tell me—has the money

<sup>1</sup> A name signifying, "Evil bird."

<sup>2</sup> The blackmail levied by the banditti on the richer people in a town.



I promised been given to the widow Paolina?"

"Without doubt," answered the notary, beginning to hum thoughtfully and then stopping himself abruptly. "Without doubt—that is to say the widow Paolina would have had the money, but being in the last extremity of a fever I thought it wise to refrain from bestowing your gift on her, until she recovered sufficiently to thank you;" and he began humming again.

Cesario gave the notary a shrewd look, and then beckoned to Serafino and Massoni.

"Signor Poli," he said, "is becoming chilled by the night air. He must warm himself." And at this his two companions made a movement toward the notary who drew back from their approach. It was useless to attempt to escape however, for Cesario and the others forced him to take his stand with the back of his legs to the fire, which Massoni stirred into a brisk blaze. Here they kept him at the point of their daggers, so that he was prevented from stirring, and it was not long before Signor Poli began dancing again.

It was a sight that I could not refrain from laughing at. There stood the notary, afraid to move because of the daggers pointing at him, and each moment becoming warmer at that part which was exposed to the fire. The bright light showed off the faces of the bandits and their uncouth dress of skins, Massoni's eyes glistening with a steady look, and Serafino's broad, good-humoured features reddened.



ing to a deeper shade in the blaze. Cesario remained opposite Signor Poli, with his arm outstretched, so that his dagger's point was almost touching the unfortunate notary's breast. Behind the fire, the entrance to the cave made a large black patch against which the group stood out vividly.

There was a solemn silence for the space of a minute perhaps, and then the notary gave a howl which died away in a long echo.

"Signor Arrighi," he exclaimed; "there is already the smell of roasting cloth at my back, and the feeling as of a dog's teeth in my legs. Massoni—gentle Signor Massoni—is this the return for all the services I have rendered you? Think of the time when I brought you the intelligence that you were to be hanged?"

"Aye, I recollect," replied Massoni. "There is someone to whom I owe a reward. He who betrayed my being at Corte to pay a dutiful visit to the third wife of my dead grandfather."

"Who would have bequeathed you her money," put in Serafino, "which indeed was yours by right of inheritance;" and then a laugh went round, although I cannot give a reason for it, and the notary fell kneeling.

"Good gentlemen," he implored, "if it is for a trifling matter of a few ducats that I am being fried like a chicken, I will pay the sum. Noble Cesario, I have seventy-five florins in my pocket—let me go or they will be melted."





His dagger's point was almost touching the notary's breast.







"I said one hundred," replied Cesario. "You may have the other twenty-five, perchance?"

"This is a fire that Saint Vitus himself would have shrunk from!" yelled the miserable victim. "I am in torments—let me go!"

"You can go," answered Cesario, "when you have found those twenty-five florins."

"You may search me," shrieked the other, "but will not find them."

"But you can tell me where they may be found," said Serafino playfully. "Hasten too, for I am wanting my supper, and a roasted notary has an odour worse than carrion."

"The florins are beneath a stone not ten yards away," moaned the wretched man, as he began crawling from the fire. Nobody hindered him, but Massoni went to the spot which Poli had pointed out, and there found the missing coins. These and those in the notary's pocket made up the sum that had been demanded, and was divided equally among the three bandits.

"One word in your ear, Signor Poli," said Cesario, looking down at his victim who was rubbing his scorched legs dolefully. "You know how warm our fire is—this is your second taste of it. See that the widow has every *soldo* of the money I sent her, or you shall sit on the fire when I catch you."

The notary gave a wriggle of pain, as he knelt, rocking himself to and fro, and then Cesario and the rest sat down to supper which Serafino served



deftly. By and by Poli came crawling up to us, and Massoni, clapping him on the back, held out a brimming pannikin of wine, which was drunk off by the notary with a gurgle of satisfaction. Then he became friendly, laughing and chattering with the best of them; but now and again I saw him cast such a look of vindictive rage at Cesario, that I understood the reason why Signor Poli was called *Angellone* by his fellow-townsmen.

He became very talkative with me, however, inquiring my name and the reason for my taking to the mountains, and to all his questions I gave him a plain, truthful answer. I had nothing to disguise, so before the notary left us that night he knew all I knew of myself and my cousin Fabiani Brasco. He made no remarks on the short history, but shook me by the hand when he departed down a narrow path on his way to Corte. Cesario bade him not forget the advice he had given him respecting the money to the widow Paolina, and then into the darkness went our visitor.

Cesario kept me talking for some time after the two others had emptied the cave, and he explained the reason for Signor Poli coming up to us.

"There are many things in which I find the notary useful," said Cesario. "He gives us information and brings the money that we require—he is a great thief, and would keep full half the sum, did we not treat him as he deserves—that is the second time he tried to cheat."



"But supposing the notary refused to come to you?" I asked.

"Then maybe the notary would be found one morning with his throat slit," replied Cesario placidly, "and the money-lender's house might be burned, or a dozen other things happen. But why talk of these things?" And Cesario shrugged his shoulders, getting up from the ground with a yawn and went into the cave.

It was a great roomy place, having depths of black shadow, into which the light from a lantern that hung upon the wall, could not penetrate. Guns and other weapons were in abundance, and in a nook lay Serafino snoring loudly. Massoni was sitting close by the entrance, keeping a watch against a surprise, that might come at the most unexpected moment for what we knew; and Cesario pointing to a thick bed of straw, that had a gaudy blanket lying on it, bid me lie down. I needed no second order, being tired and sleepy, and with a dim recollection of a roasting notary I sank into a deep slumber.



## CHAPTER V.

### THE THREE BANDITS.

**B**EFORE a week had gone by, the wound in my shoulder was healed, and I had become so accustomed to my new life, that it seemed as though I had never known any other. And more than this, Cesario Arrighi and his comrades Serafino and Massoni were already like old friends to me, proving themselves generous, light-hearted companions, without any particular care for the future. They had fled from justice and might be slain with impunity if discovered and arrested, but these were events very unlikely to happen, for three braver men never lived than they, nor any who were better able to defend their lives. Their bravery had been tried more than once, Serafino telling me the story without a trace of boastfulness, how he had fought the gendarmes who had been sent to capture him, and how Massoni kept the mountain pass secure, when Cesario lay ill a year ago. I did not hear the story at once, but piece by piece as it were, when we all sat in the warmth of the blazing fire of an evening, amid the everlasting silence of the mountains.



Cesario told me that Massoni's father had been unjustly condemned to the galleys, and that his enemies had triumphed. There was no redress, nor hope of obtaining his father's release, and Massoni vowed vengeance upon those who had brought ruin and shame on his family. Time went by and at last his opportunity came. It was the day when his father's bitterest enemy—he who had sworn falsely against him—was entertaining a number of friends, and Massoni, entering the house, denounced the man before the assembled company, challenging him to a duel.

“It would have been easier to have shot his enemy,” said Cesario, “but Massoni scorned to do that without preparing him, so he offered him the *duello*. Thereupon the fellow, brave enough, having companions with him at the moment, and being a well-to-do man, whilst Massoni had no more worldly goods than his gun and a coat with a dozen silver buttons on it, called to his friends to throw the intruder out of the house. This enraged Massoni.”

I gave a glance at Massoni who lay in the entrance to the cave, Cesario and I being beside the fire, a little way from him, and marked his stern face, which few would care to encounter when it was fury-lit.

“I cannot tell you what ensued immediately,” continued Cesario, “but the end of the matter was, that his enemy never brought false witness against any more unfortunate people, but lay dead within



a few moments, and two of his friends with him. Massoni is a very lion when there is fighting to be done, you must understand. He fled to the *macchia* when he had subdued his foes."

"And how came Serafino to turn bandit?" I asked, after a little pause in our talk.

"Serafino," answered Cesario, thoughtfully, a little twinkling laugh coming into his eyes, "was to be married to the only child of a miserly fellow in Bando. Serafino declares her to have been the most beautiful girl in Corsica, and an angel moreover, which I rather doubt. In Bando was another lover, who agreed with Serafino's opinions, I suppose, and between these two there was a fiery jealousy—it was the fault of the girl that led to a quarrel between her two suitors, and Serafino going quietly along the road one day, was shot at, and two of his fingers went flying from his hand. No slight thing this, you will agree, and the more to be angered at when the man who had fired the shot, meaning to take Serafino's life, for there was no secrecy about the attack—the fellow had openly declared his enmity—when the man I say, had won the girl for his bride, whilst Serafino was mending of the wound. The wedding guests were dancing merrily when Serafino shot the bridegroom through the heart. He is an excellent marksman, for all that two fingers are missing from his left hand."

Serafino was absent when Cesario told me the story, and upon his return I watched him with a



new interest. He was a merry-hearted man, of stout build and careless of everything in the world. His share of the *taglia* was more often than not given away in charity, through the notary, for Serafino had neither kinsman nor friend in need of money. He had, as I have already told, a broad, good-humoured face, and the voice of a screech-owl when he sang, but it could send out the roar of a bull when raised. He told the strangest stories and the most laughable ones ever heard, making a joke of the law which he said should never come nearer to him than the length of a gun-barrel off.

I shall never forget those days I spent in the mountains, nor the evenings in which we used to sit round the blazing fire, when I forgot the dangers that beset my comrades and the certain fate which awaited them when they should be captured. What a cosy dwelling the cave made; cool at the hottest part of the day, and warm when the driving mists and heavy dews were upon the desolate region. There was always plenty to eat and good wine enough, whilst beside these, there was rich booty to be gained, and this neither Cesario nor his two companions scorned. Far in the cave was a spot, cleverly concealed, which Cesario showed me, and where lay some glittering trinkets.

"They belong to a Genoese," he said, "who has molested and oppressed our countrymen without hindrance until Massoni and I chanced upon him some months ago. A pitiful fellow whom we were



satisfied in flogging, after we had emptied his carriage of those baubles. He had a guard too," and Cesario laughed in his quiet way, as if remembering something when he told me this.

The cave was our principal hiding-place, but there were many others if occasion had required their use. Deepshaded forests which had never heard the woodman's axe, dense thickets of shrubby oaks, albratro and myrtle, that covered the slopes of the mountains; and dark ravines, down which tumbled roaring silvery streams; amid these not all the *shirri*, nor gendarmes in Corsica could have traced us, and it was amongst such surroundings as these that Cesario Arrighi nursed the vengeance he had sworn against Fabiani Brasco and his kindred.

One afternoon the notary came up the mountain on another visit. He had some important news to tell Cesario, so he said, and seemed to have forgotten and forgiven the treatment he had received on the last occasion of his coming. He chatted and laughed, and showed a new pair of stockings he wore, for the others he told us, were so scorched, that they were past all mending when he reached home.

"Then you should keep the remains to remind you what is likely to happen if you deceive us again," said Cesario in his grim, quiet way. "For look you, Signor Poli, I shall not be content in only warming you if you are treacherous."

The notary giggled, but it was plain that he felt uneasy in his mind.



"Treachery," quoth he, "that is a hard word, Signor Arrighi, and the last you should address to me. Remember what I have done in the past, and imagine what I am going to do in the future for you."

Cesario made no answer but sat regarding the notary with a thoughtful look that was not pleasant, to Signor Poli, for he fidgeted and turned his face aside.

"When one calls to mind all the troubles that beset them in Corte," he said, "it makes one envy the peace and the ease of your lives up here. There are no tax-gatherers, no prying neighbours, no gossips to take the good name from an innocent man. You will continue here, Signor Arrighi, until——"

"Until it pleases us to move to another spot," replied Cesario, "or until—but you understand what will drive us away!"

"Truly," answered the notary, "but the *shirri* might as well pursue a sunbeam as you—there is no fear of their making trouble."

They chatted on for some little time, and then Massoni began playing his shrill pipe, ordering the notary to dance. It was a simple, harmless jest, this of making the lean fellow caper, but there was such a sameness in our life that even the notary's antics pleased us. But what helpless rage there was in the man's face, as Massoni played faster and faster; what a laughable figure he presented with



his great flaxen wig twisted awry, and his black skirts flapping like the wings of a dying vulture in the fire gleam. And Massoni played until the notary could dance no longer, but tumbled breathless on the hard rock, praying for a respite. Serafino and Massoni enjoyed the sport as boys might have done, but Cesario was silent, and presently he drew me aside.

"I have heard something from Signor Poli this evening," he said, "and would have you take a message in Ajaccio to-morrow, Camilla. Will you go?"

I agreed gladly enough, for the solitude of the mountains had dulled my spirits, and I had never been into Ajaccio, so that the prospect of doing so now pleased me highly.

"It is to see Emanuel Matra," went on Cesario, "to take a letter to him—ask of Fabiani Brasco when you have told Emanuel your name."

I promised to do as Cesario directed me, and we went back to the others. Our evening meal had been prepared, and there was not one of us who enjoyed it more than the notary. His good humour was quite unusual, and it was late before he departed down the steep path which he trod gaily, giving a farewell skip before disappearing into the forest below.

I watched his going and then, full of my errand for to-morrow, went into the cave and was soon forgetful of everything.



## CHAPTER VI.

### WHAT NASONE TOLD ME.

**I**T was a glittering morning when with Cesario to guide me as far as the direct road leading to Ajaccio began, he and I went down the steep path from the cave, Serafino standing upon a point of rock, waving his red cap as a sort of farewell to me, although I was to return next day. I could see his big body for a long time clearly marked on the blue sky behind him, but presently we were in the thick of the trees, and Cesario keeping a keen watch on either hand, added to the directions he had given me overnight, by describing the manner in which I should find Nasone's house easily. To him I was to deliver the letter and parcel of trinkets, that Cesario had prepared, and to bring back something which Nasone would give me for his kinsman.

It was a long way down the valley through which went the narrow path, leading on one side to Corte, and on the other to the main road to Ajaccio. This latter, Cesario said, I should not easily mistake, and it would be wise if I asked neither for direction nor



information from any wayfarers I might chance to meet or pass.

"Above all," he continued, "beware of your relatives Fabiani and his son. Keep away from where the trees grow thickly by the roadside, and where a rock may hide an enemy. You might have Poli, the notary, cross your path—beware of him also."

"But he is very friendly with us," I replied, surprised at Cesario's warning.

"It is better to be over-cautious than over-confident," he answered, "Signor Poli has a curious method of showing friendship, if all the stories told of him be true, and therefore I bid you beware of him."

We had gained the point which Cesario told me it would be dangerous for him to pass, and here we parted. The little town of Corte was plainly visible through the trees, lying as it were against the foot of a steep hill, that was crowned by a frowning castle, and turning my face from this, I set out on my long walk to Ajaccio. Cesario had disappeared, and I was alone with nothing beyond the directions he had given to guide me to my destination, but stepping out with a good pace, I resolved to reach the town before darkness set in, the warnings I had received hastening me.

It was not until sunset, however, that I came footsore and weary in sight of Ajaccio, and night had fallen by the time Nasone's house was found, a curious place, which, in spite of Cesario's directions,



unless a kindly fellow, returning homeward from his day's coral-gathering, had shown it me, I should never have discovered. Nasone was well-known it seemed, and I remember the fisherman's laugh at hearing of my paying Nasone a visit, "For," said he, "you must know, that there is nothing less to the old fellow's liking than to be disturbed after nightfall. They say he deals in the black art, and can raise a spirit as easily as another man could recite an *Ave Maria*."

I wished it had been daylight when my guide told me this, or that Cesario had sent someone else to visit his relative, yet having come so far, and being moreover very tired, I resolved not to delay in my errand, but to perform it as speedily as possible, and being now at the very doorway of Nasone's house, I thanked my friendly guide, who departed down a narrow alley, and then with a quick jerk, rang a great bell which jangled and growled for a good two minutes after I had disturbed it. Presently I heard the sound of shuffling feet from within, and the next moment the door opened just wide enough for me to see a face which it required no telling was the face of Emanuel Matra.

"This is a late hour," he growled, "who are you and what is your business?"

I gave him an answer that brought the door a foot or two wider instantly.

"From Cesario Arrighi?" cried Nasone, altering his tone. "Then come in quickly—cast a glance



around before I bolt the door, and be certain none have seen you come here."

I gave a look up and down the narrow street, and then Nasone had wellnigh dragged me into the passage, shutting the door with a gentle hand, and bolting it as though the treasures of Genoa were hidden behind it.

"The greatest comfort of a lonely man's life," he whispered in my ear as we went up a winding staircase, "is to remember the locks and strength of the bolts on his house-door. Aye, and the thickness of the door itself, that no bullet can ever get through. Especially in such a case as mine, which is that of a silversmith, as may be seen by anyone, so soon as honest daylight comes."

Up the winding staircase we went, Nasone's face making a great shadow on the grimy wall, and at length reached a room where burnt a fire, a great dog lying before it, that came fiercely at me as I entered, but lay down again at a word from his master. On one side of this room was a coffer, bound and strapped with iron, and for the rest the place was comfortable enough, and lighted by a curiously shaped lamp, hanging from the ceiling.

Nasone read the letter I had brought, and when he finished it, looked hard at me from beneath his bushy eyebrows, as he took the parcel of trinkets I had brought.

"Cesario says that your name is Camilla Negroni," he said, "and that you are the son of my old



friend Negroni of Bastia. You have been living with Fabiani Brasco?"

"Ever since my father's death," I answered, "and this is the first time I have ever visited Ajaccio."

Nasone gave a little nod, beginning to unfasten the strap of the parcel and examining the contents which were Cesario's share of the things I had seen in the cave.

When this had been done, they were put away in the ironbound coffer, after which Nasone brought some food from a cupboard, and filled a great silver flagon with wine. I was hungry and worn-out with my long walk, and it was not until my supper was eaten that Nasone spoke again.

"Has your cousin Fabiani," he began abruptly, looking at the fire the while he spoke, "ever told you that your father was a well-to-do man, and you will be rich one day, Camilla?"

"I know that my father possessed some wealth," I answered. "Paulina, our servant, told me that; Fabiani never spoke of it."

"He was not likely to," continued Nasone, "for Fabiani has reasons doubtless for not speaking. He has seized all your dead father's property, holding it as his own by the aid of a certain notary, named Poli, who lives at Corte."

"Signor Poli!" I exclaimed. "Why, he is the man who comes up the mountains to us. Cesario burnt his legs only the other evening."

"I think he will do more than that one day,"



replied Nasone. "Cesario is slow to speak, but when the humour takes him to do a thing—well, it's as good as done. He vows to take Fabiani's life, and depend upon it he will do so. Signor Poli—yes, Cesario gave him a taste of punishment, yet it was not half enough. Poli is the greatest rascal in Corsica. Moreover he is in league with Fabiani to deprive you of your money, my lad, and it only needs you to die, for your cousin to enjoy it in peace. But that shall not be if I have any power to hinder him. How came you to leave his house?"

I told him the story of my saving Cesario's life, and how Teodor and I had quarrelled and fought.

"It was a planned quarrel," said Nasone after I had finished, "it was meant that Teodor should kill you."

My face flushed with anger against my cousin and his son as Nasone told me this; for that he spoke the truth was without doubt. He and Fabiani were well known to each other, for my cousin, I learnt, had borrowed money many times from him. The visit to Ajaccio Fabiani had planned, but which Cesario had prevented, was for that purpose, and the notary also was a visitor to the silversmith's house.

Nasone pondered a long time after telling me this, and at last a plan formed itself in his mind I suppose, by which the plot against me might be frustrated. He said that I must return home, and



treat my cousin as if I knew nothing of his treachery, and that meantime, he, Nasone, would set to work in order to protect my rights.

"I know a man here," said he, "who is as honest as anyone in Corsica; and we will prepare at once to prevent any further wrong being done you. You have saved the life of my kinsman, and though it were ten times harder to punish Fabiani than I think it will be, yet I will do it out of my gratitude to you."

There was a kindliness and sincerity in his voice that made me put trust in him, which time was to prove wise or the reverse, and I promised to be guided by the directions he gave me. I would return to Fabiani's house, saying nothing of the events which had driven me away from it, nor of the manner of my living since going. Meanwhile Nasone would begin the management of my affairs, and I was to visit him again at the first opportunity. Firstly however, I must go back to Cesario, and that without delay, taking with me the promised reply to his letter.

When all these things had been decided the time was long past midnight. Nasone brought a bed from out the cupboard—that great opening seemed to hold a multitude of articles, I recollect—and putting this before the fire that was burning low now, he bade me go to rest on it. Then he and his dog went to another part of the house, where I could hear him moving about for a long time,



and I fell to thinking over the strange information I had gained. I was eager to see my cousin, and would have liked nothing better than to have denounced him for his treatment of me; but that could not be done yet. Nasone said that Fabiani was a shrewd, designing fellow, and a difficult one to match for villainy—if Cesario had not besieged him, and thus hindered his plan, worse might have happened to me than had already.

The dawn had scarcely come when I got up from the bed. Nasone was already stirring, and having eaten breakfast I started upon my return to Cesario, Nasone going with me for some distance in order to show a nearer way to the mountains than I had traversed overnight. It would shorten my journey by an hour or two, and it was by reason of this that I gained the parting way in full daylight, where Cesario and I had separated yesterday. Through the silent valley I went, and came at last to the ascent, expecting at every step to meet one of my companions; but the path was silent, and up it I passed, going over in my mind again the things which Nasone had told me.

So engrossed was I in my thoughts that I reached the clear space from whence the winding road led to the cave, and the jutting rocks that gave such a wild and desolate look to the view, could be plainly seen, without heeding the end of my toilsome journey, and then suddenly I was brought back to my senses by the sight of some black figures creeping



cautiously upward not a hundred yards in front of me. That they were neither of my companions was seen at a glance, and also that the strangers were armed and clothed in the same manner as some soldiers I had passed in Ajaccio. There were six of them dotting the grey rocks, and one had reached a projecting point from which the cave might have been discovered. Drawing back into the shadow of a tree, I watched the man with breathless interest, as he clung like a large lizard to the rock, lifting himself higher and higher until at length his head and shoulders were above the summit. For a moment he remained thus, and I saw him making a signal to those below him, and then suddenly, startling every echo in the silent region, the report of a gun rang out; the figure upon the rock threw up his arms wildly, there was a scream, and down like a dead bird through the boughs dropped the man with a crash, almost at my feet.



## CHAPTER VII.

### THE ATTACK ON THE CAVE.

FOR a moment or two I remained in indecision. It was plain that Cesario and his companions were on the point of being attacked, and the thought of their capture filled me with despair; but it was plain also that they had taken the alarm and were already defending themselves. Massoni must have been on the watch, and his eyes, keen as an eagle's, had seen that cautious head which raised itself above the rock for a moment only, yet long enough for Massoni's bullet to go through it.

There were five of the *shirri*<sup>1</sup> still left against the three bandits, however, and there might be others to join in the attack on the cave. I must gain my companions without delay, and without being discovered, moreover, and the remembrance came like a flash to my mind of a winding path which Cesario had shown me a day or two since, that led to the cave and was safe from observation. I was not far from the place where this path began, and creeping under the thickets I quickly reached it.

<sup>1</sup> Gendarmes.



Only in cases of great need would anyone have chosen that way, for it went round a rock without so much foothold as the other dangerous pass I have mentioned, but the ivy grew so thickly against the rough surface as to serve the purpose of a ladder. To this I clung, moving my feet carefully onward, disturbing the birds which had gone to roost an hour ago, and bringing them about me with fierce cries; but I gave no thought to them. There was other danger to be encountered beside that perilous climb amid the ivy branches, and in a short time I had gained firm ground and was speeding toward the cave.

From the little eminence at which I arrived Cesario and his two companions were seen, and I raised a cry of warning; Serafino, without moving, answered me, and the next instant I was beside him, whilst Cesario dragged himself to us, his face stern and set.

"The enemy is upon us," he whispered. "Speak softly, Camilla. Have you seen the *shirri*?"

"There were six whom I saw at the first. Now there are only five. But they are close at hand," I replied.

Massoni who was stretched out, holding his gun aimed, laughed as he heard me say this. "They should be more careful in showing their heads. Five left you tell us"—and he fixed his gaze on the point again where the man had fallen, Cesario and Serafino drawing closer to the mouth of the



cave than they had been when I joined them. There was very little said, and I quickly armed myself, throwing a look at the interior of the cave, where far back burnt our lantern, and then joined Cesario who with Serafino at a little distance away was guarding the entrance to our retreat; Massoni had not moved, and thus we waited for the attack.

"The saints send me a head over yonder rock speedily," laughed Serafino softly, "or the whole shape of a man, so that I can pull a trigger on him. I am longing for the sight of an enemy, and if it come to dagger-play, Cesario, and may I never sing again, or there shall be one gendarme the less in Corsica before I die."

Cesario made no reply, but his finger was at his gunlock, and a bullet went whizzing against something in the distance.

"Ill aimed, *camerado*—it should be thus," and Serafino fired, whereupon something black flew in the air, and all was silent again, when suddenly Massoni sprang down from his position, calling us to follow him, for with a shout the *shirri* were at hand—five of them on the broad space before the mouth of the cave. How they had reached this I cannot say, but that they knew the intricate paths as well as we did was evident, and the next instant a desperate fight began. Dropping his gun, for at close quarters it was but a hindrance, Massoni had drawn his stiletto, singling out a brawny fellow from



the rest of the gendarmes, skilfully drawing him away from the main battle, leaving Cesario, Serafino and myself to engage the remaining four men. I could hear Massoni and his antagonist in fierce conflict, but there was no time to look their way; Serafino was swinging the butt of his gun like a thrashing flail, and back to back against each other he and I had work enough and more to keep off our foes. Now and again I saw Cesario fighting bravely, but it was only a momentary glimpse.

And in this manner for the space of some minutes did the fight continue, when suddenly Serafino had seized his opponent, forcing him to the ground and kneeling beside him. I had been pressed back against my companion, a sword point being within touch of my neck, but losing his support I fell backward. That saved my life, for my enemy stumbling after me, met my stiletto that went straight into his breast, and he gave a gurgle, as he came headlong to stillness.

I was on my feet again in an instant, and saw Serafino lifting his enemy's head a foot or so, bringing it down on the rocky ground, and heard the man's skull thud dully. Twice was this done, and Serafino holding the insensible body in his arms, moved to the edge of the descent and hurled it into the black depths. The fight was over by that time, for Cesario's antagonist had fled, leaving a thick trail of blood to show the way he ran, and Massoni, panting, and bespattered with great crimson



stains, was standing over the dead body of a *gendarme*. His rage, not quenched yet, although he had been victorious in the deadly encounter, prevented him from speaking, and I saw that he was badly hurt. But of that he was regardless, treating the wound as though it were nothing when Serafino stooped to bind it. Cesario also was hurt, being almost past the power of moving, and I had a cut across my arm. But we had won the battle, and Serafino lifted up his voice with such a shout of rejoicing that it might have been heard at Corte.

Short work was made of the two dead men, whose bodies were cast over the edge of the rock, and then we entered the cave. There was no ruddy fire set burning that night, no merry talk, nor the sound of Massoni's pipe, but we were busy in patching up our various hurts. Serafino had escaped free from the slightest wound, and I think he felt ashamed of his good fortune, for he made excuses for it.

"If I had given the fellow longer time to consider he would have driven his knife into me, I have no doubt," said he, going with a pannikin of blood-dyed water to the entrance of the cave; "but when an enemy's thick skull is within one's grasp, one must act quickly. I am perplexed in thinking what reason the *shirri* had in disturbing us. If it was that Genoese who raised the turmoil—we have done nothing worse than he and his cut-throat countrymen have done many a time, nay, not half so much



harm as Felix Pinelli of Bastia has done—I hope I may meet him anon.”

“We have only seen the beginning of our trouble,” replied Cesario, who sat nursing a wounded hand; “for mark me, that we shall have a stronger force sent against us, so soon as that fellow reaches Corte—he who escaped me.”

“And why should he go to Corte?” asked Serafino. “He and his dead friends may have come from Ajaccio, or Calvi, or even from Saint Florent—who can tell? One thing alone I am content to know, which is that wherever they came from, five of the six will never return to it. How say you, Massoni?”

“It matters nothing where they came from,” replied Massoni, “and I am of Cesario’s opinion that we are likely to be further molested.”

“We shall be safer if we move to another part,” said Cesario; “although I know of none that promises greater security than this does.”

“I am against moving,” answered Serafino. “I am at home here, and have an acquaintance or two in Corte who would miss my society sadly if I leave this neighbourhood. There is Stefano of the vine-covered inn—it stands within a stone’s throw of the castle—Stefano who greets me like a brother whenever I chance at his house. I am almost inclined to go there this night, for never yet were you and Massoni duller than now,” said Serafino recklessly.

“The saints forbid that you ever sing whilst



Stefano's house has guests in it," retorted Massoni, "or that the guard at the castle are on the watch."

"I never give a thought as to who may be in hearing," laughed Serafino good-humouredly; "and Stefano always gives me cheerful welcome. There I meet with the one-eyed cobbler, who regards me reverently, and sometimes there are strangers."

"You had best stay here to-night," said Cesario, "and leave Stefano's house in peace. I tell you this attempt to capture us is likely to be repeated, and that before long. I have a suspicion as to the one who has set it afoot."

"That lank-jawed notary," exclaimed Serafino excitedly. "I had my doubts of him the last time we singed his legs."

"He and Fabiani Brasco," replied Cesario, giving a glance toward me. "Your cousin has a purpose in view," he added.

When Cesario said this, the story that Nasone had told me, came back to my mind suddenly. I had forgotten it until that moment, for the events which had happened since rejoining my companions were more than sufficient to banish it from my memory. I drew the letter which Nasone had given me for Cesario from my pocket, and handed it to him. He read it slowly, and after this I told him the rest of what Nasone had said, so far as I could remember.

"This makes it clear to me that Fabiani is set on your destruction, my lad," answered Cesario.



“For if so be that you are captured with us, you will share our fate and be hanged with us. Now I see the reason Signor Poli had in his friendliness—he and your cousin are leagued together, and therefore we will get away from this spot to a safer one.”

“If it is as you tell us, Cesario,” exclaimed Serafino, “I will take such a tribute of that leather-featured notary as shall never be forgotten.”

“And he shall dance to a different tune from any I ever piped to him, when next I set eyes on him,” said Massoni.

I suppose we were too weary to talk much further that evening, and when Serafino had brought each of us some food, we lay down. Massoni dragged a heap of straw to the mouth of the cave, and for all his smarting wounds kept watch until Serafino took his place. The night was still—not a rustling leaf disturbing the solemn quietude, as I looked out into the black space fronting our hiding-place that had been so short a time before the scene of bloodshed and death. Then I came and sat down with Cesario, talking with him of the story Nasone had told me, and thus amid the dead silence of the mountains the time sped away.

I suppose I had fallen asleep, for I gave a great start, and sat rubbing my eyes when the grip of a hand on my shoulder roused me, to find Serafino's face close to mine in the light of the lantern. I could distinguish Cesario and Massoni crouching



at the mouth of the cave, and there was the grey of the dawn in the sky, although as yet it was dark where I had been lying.

"Cesario is a prophet," whispered Serafino. "He foretold this second attack on us, and we are trapped like rats. How many of the enemy are at this instant before the entrance, hovering like vultures, I cannot say, but enough to keep us prisoners."

I was on my feet by this time, looking at his ruddy face which had no trace of fear in it, but was merrier than ordinarily, and at that instant Massoni sent a shot flying. There was a faint cry from the distance, and then the dead silence fell again, and I joined Cesario.

There was no need to ask questions, nor for Cesario to give an explanation of what had happened. We were, as Serafino said, caught like rats in a trap, for a strong body of *shirri* had gained the neighbourhood of the cave, and it would be certain death to any of us who ventured out of shelter. The entrance was low—one had to stoop in passing into the cave, and was not wider than four or five paces, but within it widened, so that standing behind the jagged rocks that formed so to say the door posts of the entrance, it was both safe and easy to see for a good distance each way outside. It was from here that the enemy's approach had been discovered, and as though we were in a strongly fortified castle, we kept our foes at bay.

Now and again a shot would come crashing



against the roof or side of the cave, and we answered it whenever a chance offered itself of doing so; and for some hours nothing more happened, but the gendarmes were drawing a close circle around us. None, however, had courage sufficient to approach the entrance, although we could hear the sound of the men's voices, and could distinguish the words they spoke faintly. It was well toward mid-day before three or four of the *shirri* showed any resolution on the affair, which they did by coming with a rush to the entrance. Three of them fell dead, and lay for the remainder of that day where they had died, and I remember as one of the things which will never be forgotten by me, seeing a big vulture swoop down upon one of the dead bodies, and begin tearing the flesh with a kind of rage, until a shot disturbed the fierce bird and drove it reluctantly from its prey. I recollect, too, the sound of a man's voice uttering a word of command that broke the unnatural silence which was over the scene, and how for long hours none of us moved from the watchful positions we had taken up at the first alarm.

At last, however, Serafino roused his voice to its highest and began singing the song that I heard when I came with Cesario up to the cave, and then he stopped abruptly, beginning to talk.

"A pleasant state of living this," he exclaimed, "and not to be grumbled at, except that all the water which was in the cave has gone to wash your



wounds, comrades. There is a pannikin full left, truly, but I could drink that at a mouthful, and would, only for the greediness of taking it all for my own thirst. And to think of the plentiful quantity that is in the barrel under the shade—one of these villainous gendarmes is sitting on it most likely.”

We were all craving for water, and he had spoken the most dismal truth ever uttered when he said we had only a small pannikin of water left. My wound was smarting for the want of attention, yet I never thought of dressing it afresh, for all I could think of was the strait we were in.

Massoni growled out a response to Serafino which I did not heed, and Cesario ground his teeth in silent anger. He was becoming desperate and would have gone out into the open air to meet his foes, if we had not restrained him.

“It is a better death to be shot, than to go to the gallows,” he cried. “There is only one thing that keeps me here, and that is my vengeance against Fabiani Brasco, which would be unsatisfied if I die now.”

“And think you I have no injury to revenge?” exclaimed Serafino. “What of that miserable, long-shanked notary—nay, I will be with him to-morrow or within a month’s time at the most, and that scraggy throat of his—yes, yes, Signor Angellone the well-named, you and I shall have our reckoning.”

As talking only made us thirstier than ever, we refrained from it, and the time wore away until the



shadows began lengthening. Then the sound of voices was heard again, and we listened eagerly for the words that came along the ground to us distinctly. Some men—they in command of the party, I suppose—were discussing how best to drive us from our shelter, and it was decided to bring a company of soldiers from the castle of Corte, and that petards should be thrown in amongst us. Meanwhile we were to be closely besieged; and with the prospect of being blown to pieces we watched night settle down on the mountains, and the glare of a freshly kindled fire, which our enemy had lit, coming redly into the mouth of the cave for a little space.

It was with a kind of despair that we maintained our position, exhausted by the want of water, and certain of worse befalling us, when another dawn should come.



## CHAPTER VIII.

### HOW WE FARED.

**S**ERAFINO lay resting his elbows on the ground and his chin on his hands, making a long black heap; Massoni sat with his back against the wall, lost in the gloom caused by the projecting side of the entrance, whilst Cesario and I were a little removed from our comrades. There was a dull silence, interrupted now and again by a laugh from our unseen enemies, and I remember how the stillness oppressed me. Presently, however, Serafino rolled over on his side, bringing his face into the red light of the fire, and he looked first at Massoni and then at Cesario.

“One would think we had done some great wrong,” he began, “but for my own part, I own to nothing but restoring to Corsica some of the money which the Genoese had taken from us. Witness the capture we made of Signor Doria of Furiani. He was a Genoese, and it was his own fault that we had to silence his noisy tongue.”

“It would be better to talk of what we must do in the future, than recount what we have done in



the past, Serafino," replied Cesario half laughingly, "and the least said about Signor Doria the better."

"I intend to explain that affair to the judges," said Serafino. "Maybe it will help me to save your neck, Cesario."

"Who talks of judges, and the saving of necks," growled Massoni. "I for one am not to be captured. There is a simpler plan than being led into Corte, by which we can escape."

"Yet to Corte I am going," answered Serafino. "For as I lie here I see the plan of Signor Poli quite easily. He has leagued himself with our enemies; he is set on my being made a prisoner, I who could have burnt his legs as I burnt his stockings, only that I am a tenderer-hearted man than most. Poli is a base ingrate. How say you, Cesario?"

"There are others who have set this attack on foot," replied Cesario. "Signor Poli has shewn them the way to our retreat, but he is safe at home this night. We shall have to wait before we can thank him."

"And then," said Serafino, "we shall be able to do so only by words. I should like to show him by deeds."

Massoni growled out something which I did not hear distinctly, and then we ceased talking for a time. The night breeze came sighing in upon us; the firelight leaped as the *shirri* threw fresh logs on it, and like caged animals we four in the cave



lay at our enemy's mercy which it needed neither of us to doubt. If we were carried down the mountain to Corte, there was certain death before us, for we should be hanged. The Genoese were bitter against Cesario and his companions, he had told me, seeing that many a grasping oppressor as were all the Genoese in truth, had been stopped and robbed. The bandits, however, were friendly with the country people, doing many a kind and charitable act to them, and not a shepherd or goatherd between Tox and Mount Santo Apiano would have betrayed us to the authorities.

I think I must have fallen into a doze, for when Cesario touched me I started out of my thoughts that were more a dream than anything else, and for a second had to remember my position.

"Make ready, Camilla," he said; and I looked at his face first, and then at Serafino and Massoni in surprise. "You have said nothing—but it is the only way to escape."

"I have been asleep," I answered. "What am I to make ready for?"

"To fight through the gendarmes," he answered coolly, "and get ourselves into the forest."

I jumped to my feet, feeling a thrill in every vein, and we went to the mouth of the cave, Cesario and Massoni on one side of the opening, Serafino and myself creeping toward the other, until all four were within a dozen yards or less of the shirri guards. I could hear their movements as they turned on



their hard resting places, and the clank of a scabbard seemed close to me, whilst when pressing a little forward from Serafino's broad shoulder and peering cautiously from the side of the entrance, I saw a number of men lying in the warmth of the fire, one of whom had a pair of glistening eyes, watching the cave. For a moment I saw these things and then withdrew my head level with Serafino's, but the silence was unbroken and those figures around the fire might have been of dead men, for any movement there was amongst them.

I seemed to understand without any directions what was to be done. We were to steal away and escape if possible without arousing the guards, but if discovered, then it would mean a fight to the death. I clutched my long stiletto, feeling its braided hilt warm in my grasp, and with Serafino beside me we were in the open air, our forms casting black shadows on the rock, that was blood red in the firelight. Just one swift glance to see Cesario and Massoni not a yard away from us, and we were past the drowsy guard, past the leaping fire-brands, had reached a rugged path which led downward—and then such a screeching yell broke from our foes, that it roused a thousand demon voices as it echoed from point to point, together with the reports of a dozen guns which were aimed so recklessly at us, that they did no harm.

As the shots fell we bounded from stone to stone of the well-known path, Massoni leaping like a



mountain goat, whilst Serafino stumbled once or twice with a shout of defiance as he rose again. Cesario had seized my hand and we were descending rapidly, when suddenly across the path stood a knot of blackness, which flashed into the form of armed men, as a flaming torch was lighted by one of them. We were called upon in a hoarse voice to surrender, but it were as though we did not hear, for with a leap Massoni was upon the men, hurling two of them down into the depths, and we were in the thick of a deadly struggle the next moment. How long it lasted, who fell, or how many went down amongst the blackness of the forest below, I know not, for all I remember of that quickly fought battle for life and freedom is, that my stiletto went again and again deep into some yielding body and that it came back wet. Serafino was a little in front of me, Cesario was still at my side, but of Massoni I could see nothing. From above came a din of confused voices, and blinding torchlight, and then we were bounding forward again—but only three of us. Massoni was a prisoner. I heard his despairing cry for help, I caught one glimpse of his fierce face amid a group of gendarmes; and then Cesario, Serafino and I were amongst the trees, leaving the lights and shouts behind, until the dancing glare died out and silence reigned again supreme.

There was no pause to ask ourselves how we had fared in that deadly fight, nor to speak of it



even. There must be many a mile put between our last hiding-place and a new one yet to be found, so plodding onward through the forest, Serafino leading as though the way had been a well-known road to him, we came presently to an opening in the trees, where a rill of water trickled like a thread of silver in the light of the rising moon. Here we drank, as only men a-thirst as we were, could drink, and when satisfied lay down to rest our wearied aching bodies. It was not until then that I felt the bruises and smarting cuts that I had gained on the path, and my companions were in a very similar plight to myself. But what mattered wounds, when life was safe and freedom preserved; yet we were mournful at the thought of Massoni's fate.

Serafino's voice had a sorrowful tone, for all that he said again and again that he would rescue his comrade. "The hangman of Corte shall never put a rope round Massoni's neck," he groaned. "Yet that particular hangman has the reputation of being the skilfullest workman in Corsica. Maybe you remember his hanging of Stephano Orgillani, Cesario? Ah! but it was done in the twinkling of an eye, for all that Stephano struggled manfully."

"There is time enough to talk of that presently," replied Cesario; "and I promise to save Massoni if it is in the power of one man to help his friend. Just now, however, we must see to the saving of ourselves. Our enemies are keen set on capturing us, and I propose that we get to the region about Bastia."



"Then let us go beyond Monte Rotondo with all speed," replied Serafino. "I have a relative who lives on the roadside, between Bastia and Corte, and he will shelter us. He is a nephew of my sister's husband—she who has been dead these ten years—but any relative is good enough for me when I have an empty stomach and the fear of capture in my mind."

So we got up from our resting place and went forward again, walking until the first of the dawn began to redden the mountain-tops, and presently, when I was so fatigued that I seemed walking in a troubled sleep, we reached a mud-built cottage which stood beneath the sheltering branches of a great maple-tree; and going up to the door Serafino struck it with the hilt of his stiletto, giving a shout at the same moment.

"Vincenzo," he said, turning to Cesario who stood behind him, "has the merit of sleeping like an owl in the sunlight. He had also a shrewish wife whose tongue never ceased—maybe she has gone to Heaven and Vincenzo is dreaming of her."

As he spoke the door opened and a tall figure was standing regarding us in amazement, whereupon Serafino burst into a laugh, calling him by name.

"Restrain your delight at beholding us, Vincenzo," he exclaimed, "and let my friends and me get within your house."

I do not think Vincenzo had any delight to restrain, but he admitted us readily enough. He



was a handsome fellow, roughly dressed in sheepskins, his matted hair hanging half-down his back. He was about the age of Cesario, and had eyes that seemed to pierce through one when he looked steadily, as he did at that moment at his kinsman Serafino. A very few words sufficed to explain the cause of our coming to his house, and as he listened Vincenzo's face went first pale and then darkened.

"Never a better time than this present," he said, "for leaving the silence of the mountains. There is work for every Corsican to do, who is willing to fight."

"Fight, say you!" exclaimed Cesario. "We have had our share of it these last few hours."

"Without any gain moreover," added Serafino, "for all I have won has been a troublesome scratch or two."

"And our liberty," I put in.

"With loss of everything else we possessed," replied Serafino; "for as I stand here, I can find nothing more valuable upon me than a florin which has the sound of being base coin, a stiletto sadly in need of sharpening, and a dress that holds to me by a miracle, so rent and ill-used has it been."

Serafino's condition was not worse than Cesario's or mine, for we had been forced from our retreat and were without a coin in our pouches. True, these things might have been speedily altered—there was many a well-to-do traveller passing through the country from Bastia, but Cesario would not consent to any adventure.



"I have something else to do beside the robbing of defenceless people, Serafino," he said, "and as for Camilla, that was never his trade, nor is likely to be. I have money sufficient for my wants stored up by Nasone of Ajaccio, and until I go to him, we must be Vincenzo's guests. I will repay him for his hospitality."

"You are welcome to remain here," replied Vincenzo. "I live alone—Maritano"—and he stopped with a sigh.

"I have been waiting to hear her voice," said Serafino with his mouth full of bread and sour cheese.

Vincenzo shrugged his shoulders, but made no reply. It was not required for him to tell us that Maritano was dead. And Serafino made a gesture with his head that expressed the satisfaction he felt at knowing the sad truth, after which we continued our meal in silence. When this was ended Vincenzo took us into a building where a lean cow was chewing the cud at the further end, and there being an ample supply of straw we lay down, and never yet was rest more acceptable, nor sleep sooner fallen into, than by us three worn-out fugitives from the *shirri* of Corte.

In perfect safety we remained at Vincenzo's cottage until next day, and from him we learnt that stirring events were in progress in Corsica. Living as I had been, in the strict seclusion of my cousin's house, only rumours of the struggle of Corsica for freedom



from the Genoese had reached us, and these of late dwindled into forgetfulness. To Cesario and his companions amongst the mountains very little news came, and therefore it was that the story Vincenzo told us was listened to with deepest interest.

We heard that the last of the Germans who had helped the Genoese in subduing the revolt of the Corsicans against their oppressors, had gone from the island, which was now left with only Genoa to encounter. The long and bloody quarrel had broken out afresh, beginning at a place called Rostini, where the people had risen in insurrection, a man whose name all Europe was to honour being at their head. This was Hyacinthus Paoli, well suited for his post; and with him was Castineta, a brave soldier and clever general. Vincenzo had the names of these men together with their many deeds of bravery at his tongue's tip, narrating the story of the rising in Rostini in a way that set my blood alive.

"The struggle has begun which is to free Corsica from the yoke of the foreigner," he cried, starting from the table at which we were sitting, and beginning to pace the earthen floor of the cottage. "There is need of every true Corsican. War has been declared against Genoa, and I leave my home to fight in the cause. How say you, Serafino?"

"How say I, indeed!" exclaimed Serafino, looking round at me. "What else is there to say, but that I shall go along with you, kinsman?"



"And I too," cried Cesario. "I am tired of my lonely life amidst the mountains. Yes, I am with you, Vincenzo."

"And I," was my answer.

So we joined hands, resolved to go to Rostini without delay and share the fortunes of those in revolt.

"Yet there is something to be done, even before fighting the Genoese," exclaimed Serafino, giving a nod which made his curly hair shake. "There is one who must join Paoli, and who will be with him before many hours have gone by."

Cesario gave an answering nod, and Vincenzo paused in his pacing to and fro.

"Massoni is in prison in Corte," said Serafino slowly; "but he shall not be hanged. We must rescue him."

"How?" demanded Vincenzo.

"I have a plan," replied Serafino, "an excellent plan, to be put into execution at once. Listen, my friends, and reckon Massoni is as good as free already."



## CHAPTER IX.

### STEALING THE HANGMAN.

**S**ERAFINO leant forward over the table, around which we sat, attentively hearing the plan by which our comrade Massoni was to be rescued from the clutches of the enemy.

“Massoni is now in the fortress of Corte,” explained Serafino; “and there is not a passage nor part of that place of cruelty but what I am acquainted with it. For to tell the truth, my friends, I have been there twice myself, and to keep nothing secret from you, the last time was worse than the first. It was in the matter of an aged German by whom I had been enriched, and nothing but jealousy of my good fortune occasioned a villainous gendarme to clap me into prison. The first visit I paid was as a friend of the one-eyed cobbler when I helped him carry the lieutenant’s boots into the fortress.”

“But what has this to do with saving Massoni?” exclaimed Cesario impatiently.

“A very great deal indeed, because after we have stolen the hangman”—but here the laugh we all burst into interrupted him.



“Laugh away then,” continued Serafino, “and if any of you have a better plan to the end of saving Massoni, we will hear it. Yet tell me this—to hang a man requires a hangman, and to be a hangman requires a practised hand. Such as Tortoni’s to wit. Now suppose when the moment comes for Massoni to approach the gallows, that Tortoni is absent? Who then is to hang Massoni?”

This was a question neither of us could answer, and he went on again.

“It would be rank madness to attack the fortress, and carry Massoni off by that means, but there is nothing to hinder us from capturing the hangman. He lives in a straw-thatched hovel beneath the wall of Saint Dominico’s Church, where between the hanging of criminals, the calling together of the pious to worship—he is bellringer of Saint Dominico’s you will understand, having a close knowledge of ropes—and finally by the business of writing love-letters, Tortoni earns a good living. He and I have met many a time at the vine-covered inn of which I have told you, and he is beside this a warm friend of the one-eyed cobbler whom I aided in carrying the lieutenant’s boots.”

“Come to the plan, Serafino,” cried Cesario. “You are long enough in this introduction for there being time to hang Massoni twice over.”

“There is never anything gained by hurrying,” replied Serafino, “and this is the feast of Saint Michaelino. Nobody is ever hanged on a *festa*; so rest you easy on that score.



"It is in this way then that Tortoni and I are, as may be said, old friends. Many a glass have we drunk together, and many a time Tortoni has looked at me—particularly at the region of my throat I have thought since—and as for his house, why, I know it so well by sight that blindfold me and I will lead you to it."

"Now for the plan then," cried Cesario. "Yet I see it, Serafino. We are to carry Tortoni away from Corte!"

"Yes—a good long way off too."

"And then lie in wait for the procession from the fortress, which will have Massoni in the centre of it?"

"With a black-robed brother of the order of 'La Misericorda' singing to him—as if that could comfort a poor fellow at such a time," added Serafino. "Oh, but I have seen a sight like that many a score of times, with that cold-blooded Tortoni waiting at the place of execution, wearing a look that makes me hate him even at this moment."

"And we are to rescue Massoni from the soldiers!" I cried, feeling all the excitement of the venture like a hot wind blowing on me.

"There is no other method of saving him," replied Serafino. "We cannot break down the fortress, nor hope for any mercy from the lieutenant. His heart is harder than the stones of the castle itself."

Neither of us inquired what the result of failure would be. Certain death—death by the rope, and



that without trial or delay moreover, would await us. Even I knew that the Genoese governors of the various fortresses in Corsica were little prone to show leniency to their prisoners, and there were many people who would witness against Cesario and his companion even if we were vouchsafed a hearing. Once prisoner behind the walls of the castle of Corte and our fate was sealed; but not a second thought did we give to that.

The feast day of Saint Michaelino was passing quickly away, and if Serafino's plan were to be carried out, it must be begun forthwith. The hangman's house was a good six miles as a bee flies, Vincento told us, and by the road two or three miles further. Vincento would join in the venture and it was settled that Tortoni should be brought to the lonely cottage where we now sat. What was to be done with him afterwards I did not ask, but Serafino hinted, that according to the hangman's behaviour so would his treatment be. As for ourselves, we had already decided, as I have said, to join the insurgents at once under Hyacinthus Paoli, who was at Rostini, and Massoni should go with us.

Very few preparations were made, nor were many needed, but Serafino bound a coil of light rope that was in the shed, round his waist beneath his tattered coat. "Tortoni is a judge of cordage," he said, "and I have to ask his opinion of yours, Vincento. A rope like this will serve a good many



purposes, and for a mere writer of love-letters Tortoni is one of the strongest in Corsica—if he had not been he could never have hanged that unfortunate Stephano,” and Serafino gave a jerk at the long rope, whilst Vincenzo bolted the door of his cottage and we began our journey to Coste as the sun was sinking.

It was dark by the time we reached the outskirts or the town, and although Serafino would have gone boldly up to the inn kept by his friend, and regaled us with wine, we kept him from the dangerous recklessness. The attack upon our mountain refuge, and the result of it, were events which the frequenters of the inn would find ample conversation for, and although we might have been safe amongst them, the *shirri* would assuredly have discovered us there. So it was resolved to go at once to the house where lived the public executioner Tortoni, so soon as Serafino had stolen through the vine-yard up to the inn and peeped in through the window to make certain that the hangman was not there. We waited eagerly for our companion's return, and in a few moments he came back to us, his broad face all alive with emotion.

“I looked through the window,” he began, speaking in a husky whisper, “and there at his ease, with a flagon of wine at his elbow and a bundle of papers on the table, beheld Signor Poli. With him sat a young fellow, tall and strongly built, who had one arm bandaged and supported by a hand-



kerchief, with whom the notary was talking eagerly. The window was open and I heard the name of Camilla Negroni uttered."

"It was Teodor Brasco," I exclaimed, "my cousin's son;" and Cesario uttered a sharp word between his teeth.

"Only that I was so taken up with the project of leaping in upon that villainous notary," went on Serafino, "maybe I should have heard more of the conversation, but it was clear that we owe our troubles to this young fellow whom you call Teodor. For said he to Signor Poli, 'You shall have five hundred florins, paid you by my father, if you bring about the capture of Camilla Negroni and the death of Cesario Arrighi.' And what think you of that, my friends? From this moment I reckon Signor Brasco and his father my enemies."

I made no answer, neither did Cesario, but it was clear as the sun's light that what Nasone had told me of my cousin's intentions toward me was true. My capture, although I had done no wrong, would mean my death also, and in that case the money and land which were mine would be seized by my cousin. Nay, I began to think that he had done this already and was anxious for my being condemned along with his mortal enemy Cesario Arrighi.

However, we had other work in hand that night, beyond thinking of Fabiani Brasco's villainy, and being certain that Tortoni was not at the inn we began our perilous walk through the dark streets



toward the church of Saint Dominico, Serafino leading the way and Vincenzo keeping a little in the rear.

There were not many people about, but at one or two of the taverns the sound of merry-making could be heard, and at each Serafino did his best to discover whether the hangman were one of the party.

"Tortoni has a merry soul—considering his trade," said Serafino, "and will sing as cheerfully as ever I have done; not that I like the sound of his voice, it being as though he were choking at times—a habit caught from his work mayhap." And then when he had explained this, stopping to do so, we hastened on again until at last we reached a corner of the street, seeing a little way off the light of a window.

"The house of Tortoni," whispered Serafino, pointing with his hand to where beneath the shadow of a great church tower, nestled a little house, whence the gleam of light fell from the window across the rough road.

"I will go in and engage myself in conversation with Tortoni," said Vincenzo. "I will say that I have a letter he must write for me, and you shall follow when I give the signal."

"Learn everything first about Massoni," whispered Cesario.

"Tortoni is a great talker," added Serafino; "he likes nothing better than to gossip of his business,



like any other tradesman. Gain from him at what hour to-morrow he was to hang our comrade."

"I will learn everything, trust me," answered Vincenzo, moving forward, and we saw the door opened as he glided into the house.

We drew close to the window, straining our ears to catch what was being said within. Vincenzo's signal was to be a cough, when we were to rush through the door, and as to what might happen afterwards, we left it to blind chance. But to carry the hangman off, and thus delay our poor comrade's death, was the purpose for which each of us was ready to risk his liberty and life.

I do not think Vincenzo was longer than a few moments before the signal came, but waiting there, crouched in the shadow of the tower, it seemed hours to me. Then the cough was repeated and the next moment we were through the doorway and into the room, where at a table with a pen between his knuckly fingers, and his stubby black hair growing down nearly to his eyebrows, sate Tortoni, the hangman of Corte. For an instant or two he regarded us with a surly expression and then inquired our business.

"The matter of letter-writing is becoming of importance, it seems," he said at length. "Four customers at once!"

"I have a mind to see the manner of your writing," answered Serafino, getting himself behind Tortoni's chair, but the hangman twisted himself round.



"Fair play friend," he cried; "maybe you are more learned than you look, and can read what is written," and Serafino with his hands held at his back grinned without answering, whilst Cesario, Vincenzo, and I closed in upon the sitting figure.

"Stand back," cried Tortoni suddenly, flying into a passion. "What manners do ye call these?—back, I say, or the table will be overturned;" but before he could spring from his chair we had him in our grasp. Quick as the hangman would have done it himself Serafino had twisted the cord round and round Tortoni's arms, binding them tightly, and rendering his struggles fruitless. But our victim seemed to possess a giant's strength, so that it required all ours to subdue him. In doing this the table was sent flying with a crash, the lantern by which he had been writing was extinguished, and in the darkness we all fought and reeled to and fro, Tortoni's stentorian voice adding to the tumult. But we had secured him at last; his legs that seemed as mighty as ten men's were bound and then we carried him to the door.

But alas, it was fated that our progress should not be very far, for as we hurried through the street, meaning that the hangman should walk so soon as we were quit of Corte, his weight being great, there came the sound of feet running, and before we could make good our escape we were surrounded by a crowd of people, amongst whom were a dozen or more gendarmes.



I suppose Serafino's face was known to some of the throng, and a woman came screaming up to him, uttering a cry of recognition. "The bandits," she exclaimed, "they who killed the *shirri* who would have made them prisoners," and when she said this a big officer, wearing the dress of a Genoese soldier, seized Serafino, whilst another held a lantern up to our faces.

"Your name is Serafino," he said sternly, "and this is Cesario Arrighi."

There was no use in our protesting against being made prisoners, nor would it have bettered our unfortunate position had we resisted, so with a following of howling people we were conducted up the steep hill, and reaching the fortress were put together into a cell, with a promise that to-morrow we should be examined by the governor and learn our fate.



## CHAPTER X.

### AN UNEXPECTED EVENT.

**I**N total darkness, for Serafino's request that the lantern which one of the soldiers held might be left with us, had been refused, we four unfortunate prisoners sat against the wall of the cell, and for a little while not a word was spoken. At length, however, Serafino began singing, but it added such a dolefulness to our condition that we stopped him.

"But what am I to do?" he demanded. "There is nothing to say, and I was never one to keep my tongue still."

"What part of the fortress are we in?" asked Cesario. "You know every passage in the place and every cell."

"For which reason I say that we have nothing to talk about. Unless you have a liking for the subject of hanging. That is what our fate will be."

"Is there no chance of forcing a way out of this?" exclaimed Cesario, groping his way to the door and shaking it.

"Not a single chance, believe me," replied Serafino. "One of the things pointed out to me by



that ominous one eye of the cobbler was the thickness of the doors within the fortress. Not that he need have done that—I saw it quite well.”

“It maddens me to think I am caught thus,” replied Cesario, “and that my enemy will triumph over me.”

“Yet it will not be for long,” answered Serafino. “To-morrow, or the day after at the latest, we shall be beyond the sound or sight of every trouble. Consider that.”

“And Massoni will never know that we tried to save him,” went on Cesario.

“Yes—Massoni will certainly pay the penalty of the law now,” answered Serafino tranquilly. “But what it is impossible to change, one must bear calmly. I am sorry that you, Vincenzo, have got into this loathsome prison, and that you, Camilla, are to suffer with us.”

I made a careless reply, not caring to let my misery be known; and then we fell to talking on subjects which had no bearing on our present unhappy condition. We began wondering how Tortoni would punish us, as he most likely would, for our attack upon him; and in this way we beguiled the tedious time until the grey dawn came through the heavy bars of the window, showing us the wretchedness of the cell.

We were kept without food, I remember, until late in the day, and when we had eaten some hard bread were ordered to follow the jailer to the



governor's room. Here we were confronted by a frowning officer, whose name we heard was Vittolo. He was a Genoese general, to whom in reward for his services in Corsica the office of governor of the castle of Corte had been given.

In a harsh voice he questioned each of us separately, a clerk who sat below him at a table writing our answers in a large book. It is not necessary that I recount all the useless words which were asked and answered, and there was never the least doubt as to what the end of our examination would be. Serafino and Cesario, already banned by the law, having received the "*Sonetto*,"<sup>1</sup> needed no further trial, and as for Vincento and myself, the attempt upon the person of the public hangman could not be overlooked. I suppose the governor reasoned that it was a safer plan to hang us, than to sentence us to imprisonment, the more so, seeing that we had been arrested whilst in company of the two bandits, and with a few gruff words he ordered us back to our cells to be hanged in twenty-four hours from the wall of the fortress.

"So the end of the tether has been reached," exclaimed Serafino, "and one or two private matters of my own will be for ever left unfinished. Signor Poli will flourish whilst my bones are resting easily, and Hyacinthus Paoli will lose four stout soldiers that would have fought for him and the cause of Corsica. I think that a very great pity."

<sup>1</sup> This expression means, "sentenced *in contumacium*."



"And I shall go unavenged to my grave," responded Cesario, "leaving Fabiani Brasco to triumph over me." And when he said this my thoughts flew back to the old house amongst the mountains. My cousin would enjoy my inheritance unhindered, and a great bitterness came into my heart against him and Teodor. But it was worse than useless to allow these thoughts to overmaster the far more serious ones which were there, and I entered into the conversation to divert my wretchedness if possible. Serafino showed the greatest courage I think, although Cesario was calm and resigned, whilst as for Vincenzo, he shrugged the heavy skins that formed his coat and said life was scarce worth the living under the Genoese yoke.

Twelve hours of the twenty-four had gone, for try as I might not to do so, I could not resist counting them as they struck from a church-tower below the fortress. Twelve hours more of life and then we should be led out, as many others had been led, on to the little platform which opened from a window high up in the wall, and there in the sight of a gaping crowd Tortoni would have his revenge upon us.

"I intend to make my peace with our friend Tortoni," exclaimed Serafino, suddenly rousing himself. "I shall declare that only the fear of his struggles caused me to bind him so tightly."

"I only hope he will believe you," replied Cesario,



“but that I doubt. Heigh-ho, another hour gone. How quickly the time flies!”

We were getting wearied by our captivity and the half darkness in the cell would have subdued even braver hearts than my companions'. The time wore away and we slept for a little while, waking to hear that dismal clock booming out our shortening span of life.

But as it ceased, there came another sound such as I had never heard before, although it was like the moaning of the wind through the forest; and then it came clearer until it was the sound of voices, loud and strong.

“They mean to make another festival it seems,” said Serafino carelessly; “and yet never before was such a hubbub raised.” But as he spoke another sound broke on the air—the sound of a cannon’s roar; and past the door of our cell went hurrying footsteps, and through the fortress the shrill note of a trumpet call.

“They are calling the garrison to arms,” cried Cesario excitedly, “and there are four hours yet before our execution.”

“Maybe they are collecting the guard to honour the arrival of the hangman,” replied Serafino.

“But the cannon—what does that mean?” I exclaimed, a question soon answered, for whilst it was on my tongue there came a blow against the wall of the cell which brought a shower of plaster clattering to the floor.



"Not overmuch like the tune of a festival this," said Serafino. "Yet what work is a-foot I cannot guess at. How say you, Vincenzo?"

"The fortress has been attacked," cried Vincenzo. "The patriot army is before the gates, and Hyacinthus Paoli is in Corte."

"Then the saints send him a speedy conquest," replied Serafino. "I wish I were outside helping to batter the gloomy fortress down the hill, but there is nothing to be done that I can lend aid to."

By this time a brisk cannonade was being maintained against the castle, returned by the garrison, which Vincenzo informed us was but few in numbers, and moreover that the means of defence were ill-fitted to repel an attack.

"For all its frowns the castle is a nut easily broken," said he, "and Paoli has cannon in plenty. He and his army have gathered at the foot of Monte Rotondo—yes, I remember hearing the plan spoken of—and he has advanced during our imprisonment."

"It will assuredly disarrange the plans for our being hanged," replied Serafino. "But to be midway between a fight never suited me—one side or the other I must take."

"Hark!" cried Cesario, "the fighting has reached the gates at last. They are taking the fortress by assault."

It was plainly to be heard, that fierce onset of the Corsicans against the castle. I learnt afterwards that the struggle was long and bloody; that many



brave men fell in defending the fortress and more in attacking it, and we in our cell could hear the conflict raging, the hoarse shouts of the combatants coming distinctly whilst we were vainly trying to break down the stubborn bolts of our prison. There were no more thoughts of ourselves; the prospect of an ignominious death was thrust from our sight by the stern realities of the furious battle raging now within the very walls of the castle. For indeed, strange as it may seem, my eyes pictured the savage struggle as though they saw it before them; and at last the tide of war came flowing past the thick door which held us captive. Yet it remained closed but for a little time afterwards; eager hands were battering down its strong lock and sturdy bolts, splintering the wood-work; and then we four condemned prisoners were free again; joining in the crush of armed men, who had driven all opposition before them, and helping to release those who like ourselves had been held in durance behind locked doors.

The garrison had gained their last refuge and here they laid down their arms. We saw the Genoese governor led prisoner from the very room wherein he had delivered his unjust sentence upon us, and the castle of Corte was in the hands of the revolting Corsicans. Yet even this was not the most important event of that memorable day, for coming to a door deep in the foundations of the fortress we found a solitary cell, from whence, pale and



shivering, emerged our comrade Massoni; and never will the loud cry of welcome which arose from Serafino's throat be forgotten as he clasped Massoni's hand.

And in this fashion then did I become one of Hyacinthus Paoli's faithful followers, with whom and also with his fellow-patriot Castineta and many others, I shared in some of the most eventful episodes of the Corsican insurrection against the Genoese conquerors. In company with Cesario Arrighi, Serafino, and Massoni I took part in that struggle; but although we won many a hard-fought fight, never yet was one more important to us than the attack upon the castle of Corte, nor any event happier than the breaking into that subterranean cell and restoring our companion to liberty and the glorious light of day.



## CHAPTER XI.

### WE JOIN THE INSURGENTS.

**W**HEN we had gone through every gallery and passage of the fortress along with the gallant patriots who had stormed the stronghold and wrested it from the keeping of the Genoese soldiers, and had released every prisoner, we who had been saved went down the hill into the town that was crowded with excited people exulting over the victory which had been gained. In the centre of the market-place in the midst of a throng so dense that we could only reach the outskirts of it, stood a tall handsome man who was speaking in a voice clear as a bell so that we could hear every word he said. Never before had I heard such words spoken and they seemed to make me forget myself and think only of what his speech meant. It was the call to the Corsicans to rise against their oppressors and to drive them out of the island. He told us stories of the cruelties and crimes of which the Genoese had been guilty; of the long years in which Corsica had been kept in bondage, and as he said these words and a thousand others, his eyes flashed and his upraised hand



was trembling with emotion. Cheer after cheer rang through the air as, with an eloquence beyond my power to describe, he pointed to the fortress that crowned the hill, and promised that each castle and camp held by the Genoese should be torn from them as the Castle of Corte had been that day.

Vincento was standing beside us, and when the speaker had finished, I learnt his name.

"That is the leader of whom I told you," said Vincento, "Hyacinthus Paoli, whom they have placed at the head of the insurrection. That stoutly built man who stands at his side is Castineta, and it was Castineta who led the attack on our prison."

"Then I vow every drop of blood in my body to his service," exclaimed Serafino. "For come what may to us, we shall not be hanged this day."

"It will be better to say that to-morrow," replied Cesario, "for who knows what may happen to us? See, here comes Tortoni."

"He will shake hands with me," cried Serafino. "This is no day to remember old grievances, and I am even on the look-out for my old friends the gendarmes."

He sprang forward as he spoke, and we saw him run up to where, moody and ill at ease, the hangman Tortoni was walking slowly across the market-place. There was too much excitement for people to pay any heed to each other or to mark any occurrence such as this, for was not everything that had happened that day eventful and uncommon.



"Welcome, most learned scribe of Corte," cried Serafino, giving the hangman such a sturdy slap on the shoulder that he reeled under it. "It was fated that you and I should meet this day, but I for one am glad that it was not upon the particular business in which you are so apt."

"They should have put off the attack on the castle until to-morrow," growled Tortoni. "For I have a score to settle with you, my fine fellow, though maybe the chance to pay it will come later, for all that has happened."

Serafino burst into a roar of laughter.

"Maybe the time will come that I can make amends for carrying you out of your house, Signor Hangman," he cried. "Who knows—the world is always rolling round, and some of us come to the top at times—those who do not get hanged meanwhile. So I promise you this—if ever I can do you a service you may reckon on its being as good as done."

"Bah!" ejaculated the hangman, turning on his heel, and Serafino's jolly face was all alive with merriment.

Cesario and I had stood listening to this little conversation, and then we began debating what was to be done next. Vincenzo would return to his cottage in order to sell the few articles of any value that remained to him. "The tax-gatherers see to it that we have no money after they have visited us," he said, "but times are changing quickly," and so with



a promise to rejoin us at Corte in a few days, we saw our late fellow-prisoner go striding up the road that leads to Bastia.

Our first act was to enroll ourselves in the little army of patriots, who were later on to do deeds which have aroused the sympathies and gained the admiration of the whole world, and to that end we went into a tavern where Paoli and the other leaders were in council. And if I had listened with a beating heart to brave Paoli's harangue on the market-place, what shall I say when I met him face to face and marked each kindly word he spoke to us. But few questions were asked—it sufficed that my companions and I were Corsicans, that we were ready to lay down our lives in the sacred cause of freedom, and that we were impatient for the moment when we might show our patriotism. Castineta, I remember, was a stern-visaged man, who spoke but little, yet what was said was direct and plain; and there were others standing or sitting round the table in the tavern—men who were to bleed and die in the struggle—whilst on the market-place and streets, in every house and place of gathering, was a shouting, striving crowd of valiant men and brave women.

When our interview with the leaders was over we came out of the room, Serafino singing in a way that made him conspicuous, as indeed it ever did, and Cesario took me aside.

“Will you venture into Ajaccio once more?” he



asked. "It will be somewhat of a risk you will run in returning."

"How so?" I asked. "Yes, I will go, Cesario."

"In this way will the danger be," he answered. "I wish you to bring from Nasone the money which I have entrusted to his keeping. It is a goodly amount and every *soldo* is wanted for the purchase of arms and ammunition for our fellow-countrymen."

He said this in a quiet tone, making nothing of the sacrifice it meant to him, and I glanced at his ragged dress thinking some of the money would be well spent on himself. Nor was I in a better trim, having work enough to keep my own rags on my shoulders. We had neither money nor arms, the latter having been taken from us when we were carried off to prison.

"I would go with you," he continued, "but I have other business to attend to here. I have to speak with Signor Poli."

Cesario's dark eyes shot out a dangerous gleam as he spoke, and I gave a very shrewd guess at what his business with the notary meant. We said nothing of it however, but rejoined Serafino, who was at that instant dancing and singing lustily, with Massoni beside him munching a great sausage which a good-hearted soul had given him.

And here I quitted my companions, after filling my pocket with some food which the same hand that had provided Massoni's sausage gave me, and



promising to return with all speed, set out on my journey to Ajaccio.

I think if it had not been for the earnestness that Cesario had shewn that I should visit Nasone at once, I should have waited until the next day before going, for it was already late and the walk into Ajaccio a long one. But without considering this overmuch I made the best of my way thither, using the shorter road which Nasone shewed upon my first visit to him. Yet I doubt whether I should have done this for all its shortness if the hour had been earlier than it was, for the road, although it lessened my walk, greatly increased its loneliness. Between great frowning masses of rock, deep down into long stretches of silence—at least it is in this manner they appeared to me—went the winding path, thickly strewn with stones, on either hand being openings, here and there, gaunt and forbidding like yawning mouths in the rocky sides of the hills, and over all rested the stillness of death. I suppose it was the coming here fresh from the life and stir of Corte and the exciting events to which I owed my life, that made my walk well nigh horrible to me. Every warning Cesario had given, the need for watching against an enemy, who might assail me at any unforeseen moment, and the swift coming memories of the treachery and ill-will my cousin had shewn, combined to make me anxious to reach Ajaccio before darkness had closed in. So onward I went, never relaxing my watchfulness, and at length the welcome sight of a cottage that stood



not far distant from the town came in sight. When I passed it last, which was with Nasone, a merry voiced man had saluted us from the door of the cottage, and I stopped, meaning to beg a cup of milk, for my mouth was dry and my lips were parched with thirst. I crossed to the cottage then and would have knocked at the door, but to my surprise it stood a-jar, and there was no sound from within. That horrible silence that had haunted me so long was upon the empty cottage, and I shrank back from the half-opened door. If I had thought a moment perhaps, I might have guessed half-a-dozen good reasons for the cottage being left thus, but this I did not do, hastening away as though the place had been plague-stricken, and without turning my head gained Ajaccio at last.

I remembered the way to Emanuel Matra's house, and it was not long before I was in the narrow street in which it was situated, but here as well as in the country road the strange quietude prevailed. Not a living being was to be seen nor heard, whilst here and there husedoors stood open as though the inmates of them had fled in eager haste, leaving their houses unguarded. The fast vanishing light gave a gloomy desolate air to the scene, upon which ghostly shadows were gathering, and as I passed along beneath the overhanging stories of the ancient houses darkness came upon me as though the last flickering light of a lantern had died away. But I was at my journey's end at last, Nasone's com-



fortable room was within my reach, and I placed my hand on the swinging handle of the bell.

But as I did this, there came upon the stillness a cry of mingled terror and helpless despair, that seemed to stop the very beat of my heart and caused me to start from the door way. "Help! Help!" screamed that wild voice, and it came from within the closely shuttered house.



## CHAPTER XII.

### I SAVE NASONE'S LIFE.

THE cry died away as I stood gazing at the forbidding door that would have defied anything but a cannonshot to burst it open, and for an instant I remained unable to move from the spot, so aghast was I by the sound of that awful cry. Then came the crash of broken glass and the clatter of it upon the stones as the casement above the porchway was burst open, and a confused struggling form plainly discernible against the purple sky was thrust out from the opening as I glanced upward. The cry had not been repeated, but I think the waiting for it to ring out again was worse—if that could be—than even the despairing voice itself, and I rushed into the porch, seizing the bell, and ringing such a peal as the old house had never heard before, and doing this I saw a glint of light against the lintel showing that the door was unbolted and unlatched. Without a moment's pause I was in the passage, had reached the winding staircase, and stumbling over some soft body that lay stretched before the door, I was in Nasone's room.



The light which had shone beneath the lintel had disappeared as I rushed into the house, and the staircase was in darkness, but in the room the hanging lamp showed me two men engaged in a desperate struggle in which one of them was weakening, his body resting bent out from the broken casement, and his opponent who beat with savage strength the hands of his victim which held to the crazy lattice was the taller and stronger of the two. There was only time to see this, for I had flung myself upon the murderous fellow and getting a tight grip of his throat, forced his face up to the light. It was Fabiani Brasco, and a fierce oath came gurgling from his throat under my grip.

"Camilla," he cried as my hold relaxed from the very suddenness and surprise of the meeting. "They said you were dead," and with a quick movement Fabiani struck at me with his stiletto, whilst as I sprang aside to avoid the thrust he had crossed the room, hobbling quickly, and with a groan the figure of his victim sank inward at my feet. Then I recognised Nasone, his long grey hair dabbled with blood from a cut across the forehead.

There were signs of a deadly struggle having taken place, and the lid of the iron bound coffer stood open, but of these things I gave little heed, Nasone needing all my attention at that instant. Lifting him to the hearth I placed his helpless body in a chair and then as best I could, brought back his consciousness. There was wine on the table and I



forced a glass to his lips, seeing him open his eyes greatly to my satisfaction, and then I searched in the closet, which I remembered held everything one could possibly want, for a basin and water. These I quickly discovered and having bathed his cut, and cleared his face of the blood which had dyed it, Nasone drank a deep draught of the wine unaided. I recollect how he sat, staring at me as though I had been some stranger, or another enemy waiting to attack him.

"Signor Matra," I exclaimed, "you remember me, I am Camilla Negroni, who came here once before."

"Truly," replied Nasone, smacking his lips slowly, and keeping that steady, unrecognising stare upon me. "Yes, I remember quite well. Negroni—that was the name he mentioned not an hour ago. A desperate fellow, yet I think there is something he will not forget easily."

"Signor Matra," I cried, for his mind was going wandering again, "I have come from your kinsman Cesario Arrighi."

"From whom else should you come?" he answered rather crossly. "Aye, it is all gathering in my mind. He was going to murder me. He, Fabiani Brasco."

"I came at the very instant he was forcing you out of the window," I answered. "The saints be thanked that I was in time. Tell me what has happened."

Nasone gave a shrill laugh and began looking around. "The dog," he said. "The only friend I



ever trusted without ruing the day I did so," and then as his glance passed the open door a great wail of grief came from him, for stretched across the doorway lay the faithful dog, still and dead, with a great gash in its throat.

I cannot describe the grief that Nasone showed, as with the tears running down his cheeks he stooped down, caressing the body of the dead animal. It was a sight which for all that I had witnessed so many scenes of violence and death, brought tears to my own eyes. For a moment or two neither of us spoke, and then having closed the door so as to hide the animal's stretched-out body Nasone poured out a torrent of fierce anger and threats against Fabiani. His own hurts and ill usage were forgotten, and only the slaying of his faithful friend remembered. But by and by he became calmer, and then I heard the story of his being suddenly assailed and almost murdered by Fabiani Brasco.

"Fabiani had come to my house," Nasone told me, "upon a matter of business. It is easy to understand that Cesario had relaxed his vigilance or Fabiani would not have ventured from the mountains."

"You shall hear the reason for Cesario's doing so," I said, "but first tell me of my cousin."

"It was an hour ago or maybe longer," continued Nasone, "and Fabiani having ended the business with me that had brought him to Ajaccio, suddenly began speaking of you, Camilla. And never before



did he speak more kindly, saying that it was time you were put into possession of your inheritance. You must know that a certain written parchment—no other than your father's will—was given into my safe keeping when he had come to Ajaccio from one of his many voyages. He and I were old acquaintances and I undertook to guard the parchment. You were a child then living at Bastia."

I was becoming deeply interested now, for these things that Nasone spoke about were new and strange to me.

"Fabiani who knew of my having this will," went on Nasone—"a pest on him for this smarting cut he has given me, my wits need sadly helping in the telling of this story, yet it is true enough—Fabiani as I say asked with an oily tongue, that I would show him the writing, and with that I unfastened the coffer yonder and brought the parchment out. Maybe you heard my cry for 'Help?'"

"It might have been heard at Corte," I answered.

"Yet it did not prevent his striking me to the ground, and I saw his stiletto flash before my eyes. I remember how the dog—nay, it matters not to speak of him now, but Fabiani's blood shall pay for the harm he did—yes, I remember his stiletto flash, and that then followed the breaking of glass."

"He was for hurling you from the window," I exclaimed. "But I was in the room before he could succeed. What became of the parchment?"

"Why did you not thrust your knife between his



ribs?" screamed Nasone. "You have let him escape with his life, aye, and something more precious than that, for with him has gone the will that he has stolen. The holy Santa Isabella forgive me that I ever unfastened the coffer wherein the writing has lain since the stormy evening when your father came ashore from his ship to give it into my keeping. It is gone, I tell you—Fabiani Brasco, whose murderous heart shall taste my knife yet, has stolen it," and Nasone began rocking himself to and fro, bemoaning his loss and mine in a fashion that would allow me to offer no word of comfort to him.

It was some time before I could calm him again sufficiently to make him understand the events which had happened since I came to Ajaccio last, and the nature of my errand there now. By degrees, however, he comprehended it, and I learnt the reason for that part of the town being left to itself, which was that the news of the insurrection had reached Ajaccio, the townspeople being then gathered in an open space down by the shore, leaving their houses unguarded in the excitement of the stirring times.

"Fabiani chose his opportunity well," I answered, when Nasone had ended the recital, "and has succeeded. What is best to be done, Signor Matra?"

"The best thing is to kill him," exclaimed he, "or stay—that is a task for me, old as I am. The opportunity will come some day and then Fabiani Brasco shall be repaid for the evil he has done."



"When I came to the house, there was a light shining beneath the door-lintel," I said. "The light vanished as I ran in. How was that?"

"I cannot tell," he answered. "But perhaps Fabiani had a companion whom he had left in the passage. His son for aught one knows. He and his father are in league against you, remember."

I had good cause for so doing, and for some time we sat talking over my affairs, Nasone giving me to understand that my father had left enough money to make my life an easy one. It seemed strange to think that, when I looked at my ragged dress and felt in my empty pockets. There was not a poorer lad in Corsica at that moment than I, and my anger rose against those who were plotting to deprive me of my inheritance. However, there were other things to talk about beside my own affairs just then, and I told Nasone that he must let me carry back the money which Cesario required.

"The money is ready," replied Nasone, "but it will never reach Cesario if you venture to carry it alone through the solitudes which lie between Monte Rotondo and Ajaccio. Fabiani will be waiting for you now that he knows of your being here, and therefore, although without doubt Cesario needs his money, he must wait a little time for it. A day maybe, so that I may find a companion or two who will go with you to Corte."

This was reasonable enough, and I consented to stay in Ajaccio until Nasone should deem it safe



for me to return to Cesario, and had found me companions with whom I should be secured from attack by the way. He promised to do this on the morrow, and after this he and I went through the lower part of the house, finding many things disturbed roughly, and very bitter were his denunciations against those who had done this. Nothing had been stolen, however, and when he was satisfied that his goods were secure again, we returned to the upper room, and having hung a thick curtain before the broken casement, Nasone dragged the mattress from the closet, and bade me good night. We had carried the body of the dog out of sight, and only for the tramping of feet over the stones below, as the townspeople returned home, together with the sound of a laugh now and then or some loudly spoken words, the quietude of the street was undisturbed, and having bound his head with a great bandage Nasone went off to his bed-chamber.



## CHAPTER XIII.

### ON THE ROAD TO CORTE.

**E**ARLY next morning Nasone and I left the house together, and going down to the lower part of the town found that the excitement of which he had told me overnight had increased. Gatherings of the inhabitants had been interdicted by the governor of Ajaccio, and a company of Genoese soldiers was parading the principal streets, dispersing the little groups which had collected, the soldiers doing so with threatening words and blows when their orders were not quickly obeyed. But in spite of this, it was easy to see that a rising of the populace was imminent, and that only the absence of a leader hindered its outbreak. The order that no crowds should assemble raised the discontent and anger of the inhabitants to a high pitch, and whereas last night—so we learnt from someone with whom Nasone spoke—they had met and spoken freely, to-day it was only at the risk of one's liberty that one's voice might be heard. In the harbour lay three Genoese war vessels, and in the garrison were troops who needed only the command to fall



upon the townsfolk, and thus it may be easily understood that those in Ajaccio, to whom the news of the insurrection brought exulting hope and thirst for freedom, were duly cautious in their method of showing their delight. Some there were, however, who boldly and loudly denounced their Genoese oppressors, and in a small square of fishermen's huts we found a little group of men whose eager excited talk would have consigned them to prison, had the governor of Ajaccio heard it.

Nasone beckoned three of them to him and we went a little apart from the others, he speaking in an undertone. They were rough looking fellows, dressed as fishermen, and each was armed.

"There is work for every man in Corsica," said Nasone, "but it does not lie in Ajaccio to be done at present. Yet between here and Bastia it has begun. Paoli and his friends have struck the first blow—who will join him in Corte?"

"We are ready," exclaimed the men in one breath.

"Then shall you go to him to-day," replied Nasone, "there is one," and he touched me on the shoulder, "whom Paoli and his brave followers delivered from the fortress at Corte, which is in the hands of the Corsicans now and its governor driven away into Bastia. Will you go with this lad back to his friends?"

"If there is fighting to be shared," grinned one of Nasone's listeners, "and one may be allowed to hear the sound of one's own voice, I am willing to



go anywhere. What matters it, when the tax-gatherer has taken his plunder where one lives!"

"Well spoken," replied his companion, a gaunt fellow, with the longest arms that ever a man had yet, I thought. "Remember how the widow Appel-lane was left with not even a three-legged stool to rest her body on. And that no later than a week since, I saw with my own eyes, the last thing that was in her house, carried away to be sold."

"There was one thing which even a tax-gatherer could gain nothing by," laughed the other, showing his teeth like an angry fox, "and that was the curse that the widow sent after him."

"And now has come the time when you and other brave men can take revenge for all the suffering that these Genoese vultures have inflicted upon you," cried Nasone, "let us hasten, then, back to my house, where you shall take food and wine ere you begin the journey to Corte."

There was no second invitation needed, and moving out from the little square we went back to Nasone's house. There he gave my new friends as much as they could eat and drink, and bidding me follow him to his room, entrusted to my charge a small bag of money.

"Take this to Cesario," he said, "and with it the blessing of Emanuel Matra. Say that I am willing to give every florin. I possess in the cause of Corsica's liberation, and bid Cesario hold his hand when the muzzle of his gun is aimed at Fabiani Brasco.



What is Cesario's revenge, when I think of my own?"

He was trembling with ill-suppressed anger, and a look was in his eyes that made them blazing fires beneath his shaggy brows.

"Two things are there for me to do," he hissed out. "One is to regain the writing which Fabiani Brasco stole from me, and the other is to see him fall dead at my feet as my poor dog lay dead."

I promised to deliver his message faithfully, and we went downstairs to where the three men sat impatiently waiting for the start to Corte. Nasone provided each of us with a gun, and shouldering these we went clattering over the uneven road on our way to join the army of insurgents.

The long-armed man whose name was Gaspero walked beside me, his two comrades whose unkempt locks gave them the appearance of wild animals coming behind us, talking merrily. Of what nature these men would prove I had been given no time to find out, but there was an honest look in Gaspero's face which assured me that I had nothing to fear from him. I should have had an easier mind perhaps than was beating under my jacket at that moment, if the bag of money were in Cesario's keeping already, but I banished the thought of it, and joined in the conversation. I had much to tell moreover of my adventures in Corte, and the story of Tortoni was listened to with gaping mouths. When it was ended Gaspero must needs shake me by the hand, saying it was the best story he had ever heard.



"Better even than the *improvisatore's*, who had come from Italy and earned twenty *soldos* in half an hour by narrating the 'history of Solomon' in verse."

They were like children, these rough fellows who were travelling with me to fight under Castineta, and as easily amused, but it was not long before they showed themselves to be men, aye, and as brave as any who had fought for their country yet.

On we went until the cottage I have mentioned before as standing at some distance from Ajaccio came in sight, and upon our reaching the spot, a confused sound was heard, as of a babble of voices. One of these was louder than the rest, as we stopped at the little gate which guarded the entrance to the cottager's garden.

"This is no merry making," whispered Gaspero, "and by the sound within there I recognise the tax-gatherer," and then the sounds of a woman's beseeching voice were heard begging for pity. Without pausing we went towards the cottage and pushing open the door beheld a sight, common enough in Corsica, but strange to me. The tax-gatherer with his two assistants had seized the simple furniture belonging to the cottager who was absent, nor would the supplications of the weeping woman restrain the hard-hearted fellow.

"My husband will return before many hours," she cried. "He has gone to Ajaccio to be paid money which is owing him. He will give you every *soldo* of the tax;"



"I cannot wait," retorted the tax-gatherer giving a sneering laugh, "and likely enough your husband will spend the money at the nearest tavern. Come then, carry out the bed yonder and borrow a cart from the shed, that I may have the goods taken to Ajaccio for sale."

There were several things piled in a heap ready to be carried off, and the woman gave a cry of despair.

"Will nothing hinder such cruelty," she exclaimed. "Have we ever failed to pay these hateful taxes—why do you treat us thus?"

"Cease your railing," replied the tax-gatherer, "or keep it for your husband, as do other wives. And mark you this, if these things do not fetch the sum needed I shall return and clap you and your husband into prison."

Gaspero gave a pull at his leather belt to tighten it, and without a word of warning—we had been standing behind the door unobserved—he was in the cottage, putting his gaunt figure between the astonished woman and her tormentor.

"Yes," said Gaspero, eying the tax-gatherer, "it is Signor Rota who is busy to-day. He whom the widow Appellane cursed."

"Get you gone," replied Signor Rota, beckoning to his two assistants. "I have nothing to do with such as you."

Gaspero made no answer, but stretching out his hairy arm took a great handful of the tax-gatherer's



coat and skin in his grasp, and his companions with an easy manner held back the two assistants.

"Let go your hold," screamed Signor Rota. "I am the law, and you are breaking the law in interfering. Let go, I say!" and he gave a screech, for Gaspero's fingers had a grip like a wolf's fangs. "Open the door wide," whispered Gaspero to me, and I gave it a kick to do so.

"You shall smart for this," screamed his victim, "and that before long—take your hand out of my flesh."

"Be thankful that it is not on your throat," growled Gaspero. "You had no mercy on this poor woman, nor on the widow," and then he lifted the tax-gatherer as one might lift a cat, shaking him once before casting the yelling fellow through the open door. I think Signor Rota's assistants would have run to his aid, but following Gaspero's example my companions pushed them out of the cottage.

It had happened so quickly that a roar of hoarse laughter lasted much longer than it had taken Gaspero to rescue the cottager's furniture from Signor Rota's clutches. This indeed he had done, and when the tax-gatherer had scrambled out of a prickly thicket into which he had fallen, and was coming toward us foaming with rage, it was to meet the muzzle of Gaspero's gun.

"You are safe outside the cottage," said Gaspero, "and so get back to your masters, the Genoese. This is the reckoning hour for you and them, as you will learn before long."



The look of anger changed into one of astonishment as the tax-gatherer listened, and I dare say he would have liked to hear more. But neither of us were disposed to tell him of our journey or purpose, and we saw him and his assistants disappear in a few moments at a turn in the road. Then the woman, invoking a blessing on our heads, described the harsh cruelty to which she had been exposed.

"We shall have the money ready when Signor Rota calls again," she said, "my husband has gone for it as I told the unbelieving fellow."

"I begin to think it will be a long time before Signor Rota comes to your cottage," replied Gaspero, "and as for your husband, tell him to join us at Corte."

We stayed at the cottage until all fear of the return of the tax-gatherer had vanished. I had given up hope of reaching Corte that day, for it was already late, and so we resolved upon resting so soon as it fell dark, and lighting a fire by which to sleep. I was quite contented with my company now, for Gaspero was a man after Serafino's own heart, and the others for all their moodiness were good-hearted fellows. I was confident, so having given a few words of advice to our hostess we resumed our interrupted journey.

We went by the shorter road of the two that lead to the foot of Monte Rotondo, and this road I have already described, gaining the deepest part of it, where on either side the rocks frowned down



on us, with their gaping openings black on the waning daylight. Gaspero had turned to one of his companions, asking a merry question, for we had been laughing again as we spoke of Signor Rota, when suddenly not twenty yards before us stood a line of soldiers and a loud voice commanded us to stop.



## CHAPTER XIV.

### A PERILOUS ADVENTURE.

**I**T was impossible to do anything other than obey the peremptory order, for the soldiers formed a line across the narrow road and on either side of them were the rocks. Gaspero remained a moment in thought and I clutched the money bag despairingly. For even if we were not brought back to Ajaccio as prisoners, the money that had been entrusted to my safe-keeping would be taken away from me. Quick as the thought had come I slipped aside from the others into one of the black openings that I have already stated were in the face of the craggy rocks, and Gaspero was with me. Just one glance behind to see that the other two men had vanished also as by magic and we found ourselves groping blindly into the depths of the opening, my hand coming against strangely horrible soft things that were clinging to the damp sides of the cave and dropped at my touch. I heard a viper hiss as it clung to my leg for a moment before I could shake the venomous reptile from me, and evil birds that shun daylight, disturbed by our movements,



came whirring past my face. Yet with all these horrors in the path we crept on, getting deeper and deeper into the cave, and hearing behind us the trampling feet of the soldiers who were in pursuit.

"Hark!" and Gaspero put his hand forward against my arm. "There comes one of those rascally Genoese—a place such as this is not one to struggle in," and before I knew of his intention Gaspero had fired his gun behind us and there was a sobbing cry mingling with the dull crash of the report. Then the footsteps appeared to stagger over the uneven track which we were traversing, and ali was silent again.

How far we had gone and in what direction the cave went, we could not tell, but I remember that as we moved forward again the path ascended, becoming narrower at every step, however, until at last the sides of the cave seemed closing in on me. I felt this, for not a ray of light could penetrate into that awful place of black solitude, and my breath came back on my face from the rocks as I turned once or twice. The air too was hot and stifling so that I could hardly breathe, and dreading to proceed further I called to my companion, who was panting a little way from me.

"Gaspero," I gasped, "The rocks are closing in upon us, we can go no further into the cave."

"Then we must remain here," he answered, "for there is no getting out. The soldiers will be watching for us and that means our death."



"Better to be captured than die here," I replied, feeling as though a heavy load were on my breast hindering my voice, and Gaspero made no answer.

The moments went slowly by amid the deathly silence and suffocating air that surrounded us, and a thrill of indescribable horror passed through me as lifting my hand it touched the roof of the cave. On either side, above and below, the rocks were crushing me, and it was as though I had been buried alive. Better to face whatever my fate might be, so that I could see daylight and breathe the fresh air once more, than to die thus, and stooping I crawled back to Gaspero. I was gasping out some words to him, when there came the sound of footsteps stealthily approaching us; nearer and nearer they came, and I felt Gaspero's arm move upward in the act of levelling his gun. Crash! and with a report that threatened to rend the very rocks themselves, a bullet went on its deadly errand and through the choking smoke came the scream of a wounded man.

The flash of the discharge lighted up Gaspero's sternly set face and the narrow space in which we stood, and then darkness came blinding me again. For a moment or two the powder smoke clung to my face, hindering my breath, but suddenly the thick sulphurous vapour passed away followed by the pure air, and quick as the flash of fire came a thought across my brain.

"There must be an opening higher up," I cried,



seizing Gaspero's arm. "The wind drives through the cave—let us go on," and dropping on my knees fearing to strike against the low roof I went forward, knowing that Gaspero was close behind me, and that the smoke from his gun had cleared away. On we went, the path narrowing until I could feel the rocks on either side although I held my arms extended; on, touching the roof more than once, yet my body was bent, crawling like a snake; on until the power to move my bruised limbs had well nigh failed me, and to turn my head was impossible, and then when the horror of that living tomb had numbed my senses to every other pain, there came into my despairing eyes the sight of daylight, shining through a narrow chink and filtering down the path to a dozen feet beyond me.

The light of day, but alas it showed that between us and the narrow opening the cruel rocks closed, leaving space scarcely wide enough for a fox to have passed through. But the attempt must be made to reach the opening, and free ourselves. There were dangers not to be faced should we retreat, the soldiers would be guarding the entrance to the cave, and once in their clutches our fate would be sealed. There was only one way of escape, and hopeless as the struggle seemed we pressed upward to the cleft in the rock.

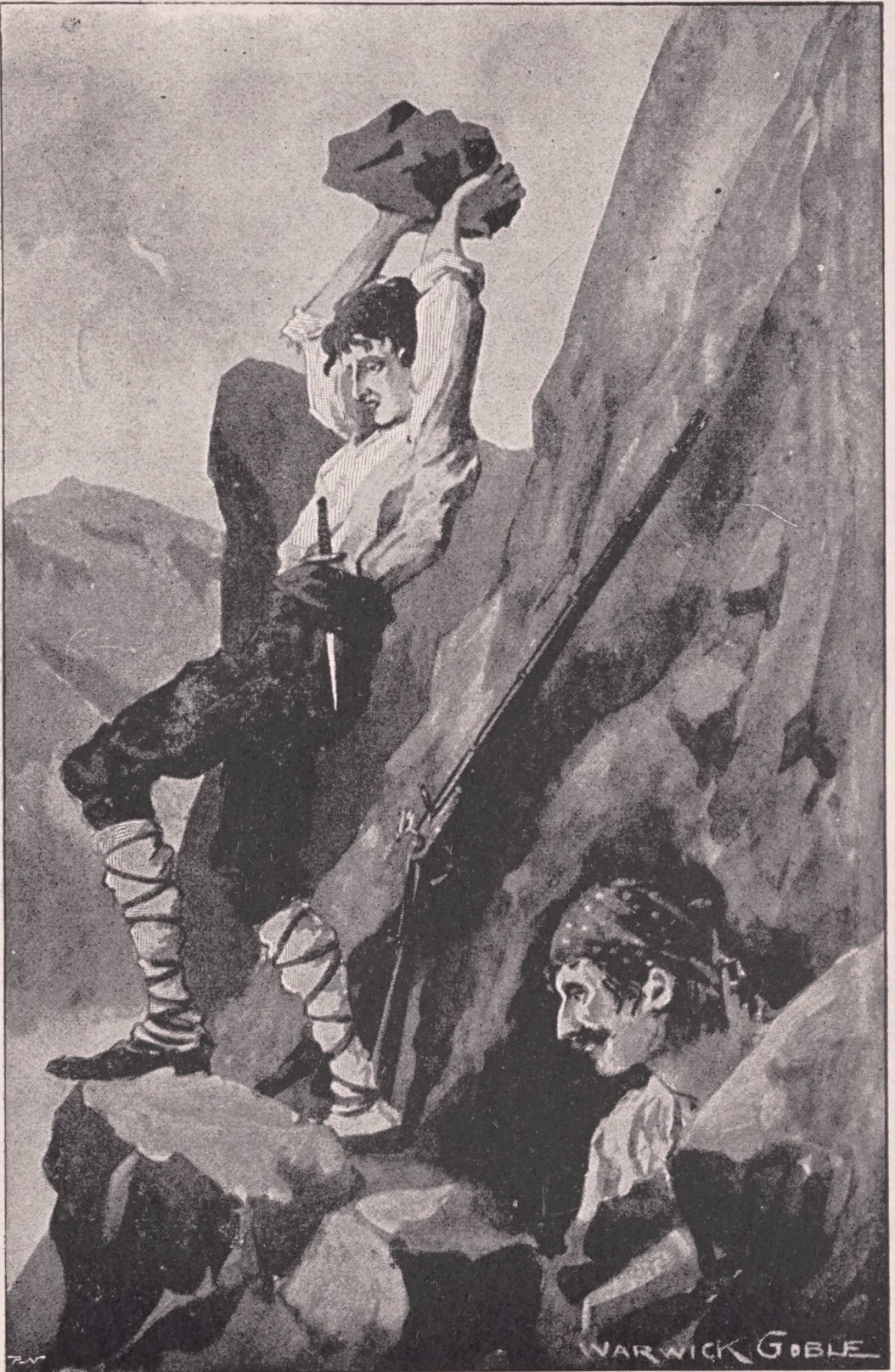
I felt the sheepskin coat tearing from my body as I crawled, but I gave no heed to that; my hands were cut and bleeding, yet I experienced no pain



as I grasped each projection and gained progress. It seemed as though the next movement must be the last I could make to gain that strip of daylight, but despair gave me strength. Inch by inch I came nearer the goal, until it was almost within my reach—nearer yet and my finger tips were on the broken stones which edged the opening. I was saved, for with a last effort I had dragged myself upward and stood trembling with excitement upon a narrow ledge, from whence I could look down to the road fifty feet below, and see the figures of the soldiers distinctly. As I glanced downward, a muffled groan came from the opening and Gaspero's voice supplicating my help. He was bigger than I, and the space which allowed me to pass through was not sufficient for him.

Giving a word of encouragement I began hewing the rock with my stiletto, pushing the blade between the little cracks that here and there surrounded the opening. Little by little I made it larger, digging down toward my companion who with his strong fingers aided my efforts, yet although we worked with desperation there was but little progress made to release him. One stubborn piece of rock that prevented his passing seemed to defy us, and it was just as I felt this last obstacle loosen its hold, that a cry came from the soldiers who were guarding the entrance by which we had escaped, and I knew that I was discovered. Then a bullet smashed against the rock not a yard from my head, but as it did so





I dashed it down full upon the soldiers.







the obstacle to Gaspero's escape moved from its place, and lifting it in my hands I dashed it down full upon the soldiers. I cannot say what happened to them in consequence, for the next instant my companion had drawn his long body upright, and we were creeping along the ledge; there was a volley of bullets hissing round us, and we had gained a refuge at last. To have reached us would have been impossible, for the rocks were as though a knife had cleft them apart so steep were they, and the ledge led us out of sight of our enemies.

But the danger was not yet surmounted, for the path went downward until it joined the road a hundred yards beyond the entrance to the cave, where we had left the soldiers, nor was there any other way by which we might have gone. There was only that narrow path, and down it we ran, reaching the main road, to be seen immediately and followed by the enemy. We were well in advance of them, however, and although a shot or two were sent after us, we were not touched, and running as only those who had death behind them could have run we disappeared at a welcome turn in the road. We had not shaken off our pursuers, however, for we could hear their footsteps, and it was when I was so spent with fatigue that I had stumbled more than once, that Gaspero suddenly stopped.

"It is fair war between us and the Genoese now," he said, "and the fighting Nasone promised is begun."

"But we shall be captured," I cried, making an



effort to begin running again. "Let us get on Gaspero."

"Rather keep those who are behind from following us," and as he said this Gaspero went swiftly to where a great boulder—such as I had seen amongst the hills beyond Monte Rotondo—lay at the wayside. And hidden by this from the sight of our enemies we waited for them, with our guns pointing straight along the way they must come.

Two. They came running side by side, their fierce eager eyes straight before them to catch sight of their prey; the heavy dress of the Genoese soldiers hindering them not one whit. Trained, hardy fighters were those two men, with whom neither Gaspero nor I could have coped, valiant fellows enough, for aught we knew, who had seen death and battle in plenty maybe, and who feared neither, but their doom was sealed. There was a double report and one of the soldiers flinging up his arms, staggered and fell with his face in the dust, but the other ran on. Only there was a change in his eager face that I could see, for he reached to within a yard of us, as Gaspero and I remained standing out from the shelter of the boulder after firing, and we saw him draw his sword; yet as he did this there went a shiver through his body, a sudden wild unearthly yell broke from his lips and down in a heap that turned red with blood as by some magic touch, he fell. Without a second look, nor thought, we were running again and the fast falling shadows came



hiding the path we had traversed, and shielding us from further pursuit that night.

We were too fatigued to reach Corte without resting, and so, having assured ourselves that we were safe from our enemies we lay down beneath the shelter of some trees, fearing to risk lighting a fire, and it was not until we had done this that I remembered Gaspero's companions.

"Leave them to escape," he said, "for none know better than they how to evade the law. And if they are not already seated in Don Angelini's wine shop at Ajaccio safe and unhurt I shall be much deceived."

So we hoped it might be so, and began talking of the insurrection that was in full progress, or why had the soldiers hindered us, I asked.

"You must ask the tax-gatherer for your answer," replied Gaspero. "He sent those villainous soldiers upon us."

However, that mattered little now, and hugging the bag that was beneath my torn coat close to me we remained resting until the dawn came. Then we started for Corte, reaching it early in the day and finding Cesario anxiously awaiting my return.



## CHAPTER XV.

### SERAFINO'S STORY.

CORTE was humming like a bee-hive on a summer day as Gaspero and I came to it. There had been a council of war held, and the full significance of the revolt against the Genoese was clearly to be seen. Cesario told me many things of what had happened since my leaving him, and not the least of these was that he had been made Colonel of a regiment, and Serafino a sergeant. Corte would be the headquarters of the patriot army, and already great numbers of the peasantry and mountaineers had gathered there, ready and eager for the march upon the Genoese strongholds. He listened attentively whilst I narrated my adventures in Ajaccio, and nodded his head gravely when I gave him Nasone's message, touching Cesario's long-cherished revenge against Fabiani Brasco.

"Nasone was asking a harder thing than he thinks when he sent that message to me," replied he, "and I cannot promise to hold my hand. But neither he nor I will have our opportunity for vengeance yet.



"Fabiani and his son have joined the Genoese in Bastia, I have learnt, and it may be long months before I have my chance."

"And what of Signor Poli?" I asked. "Have you learned this news from him?"

Cesario burst into a laugh. "You shall hear from Serafino," was the answer; and when he had carried the bag of money to the house where Paoli, Castineta, and others of our brave leaders sat in anxious consultation, and had offered it in the service of his countrymen—it was a goodly sum, I remember, and the more acceptable, seeing that money was very scarce and greatly needed—we went to the little inn which was close beneath the castle wall, and here we found Serafino in the midst of a dozen men, seated round the table. Gaspero was next to him, and it was easy to see that he and Serafino were friends already.

We joined the group, and with Stefano, the landlord, and the one-eyed cobbler, of whom our companion had often spoken, looking on, Serafino told us how he had searched Corte through to find the notary.

"And a more dangerous piece of business never yet have I undertaken," he said; "for it is not every notary who has a she-dragon for housekeeper, and it was no less an animal that I encountered at Signor Poli's."

And Serafino, sipping his mug of wine, drew a long breath.



"What happened when you saw her?" demanded the one-eyed cobbler, dragging his patch over the empty socket whence it had gone aside. "How did you fare?"

"How did I fare indeed?" repeated Serafino in a more serious tone than I had ever heard him speak. "But badly, worthy old cobbler of shoes—badly. Because regard this, I had knocked so gently at the door of the notary's house, that only one panel had cracked under the blow, and was waiting soberly—aye I was even singing—upon the step, when the door sprang open like an earthquake, and before I could withstand the assault, I was being dragged into the passage by the dragon."

"Of what sort was it, Serafino?" asked one of his hearers.

"Imagine then, a furious head of hair, that shook like the leaves of a cork-tree when the wind rushes through them; a face such as would serve as a model for the face of Santa Ingoma, the martyr of Calvi; arms such as do wear the venomous fish which drown men, and a voice—oh but I must have my cup filled again, before I describe that same voice."

Cesario pushed a brimming mug to him and Serafino drank a deep draught.

"Aye, I was at the voice," he said, smacking his lips, "But I am at a loss to find words to describe it. Have any one of you ever heard the cry of a mad fox?"



The row of heads round the table all shook as one. Nobody had heard the cry of a mad fox.

"Then consider it the sweetest music in comparison with that she-dragon's voice," continued Serafino solemnly. "And there was I, closely shut in the narrow passage with her, almost trembling for my safety, and when I asked to see the notary, I had good cause for fear. I disguised the nature of my business with him—it was to pay my debt for all Signor Poli had done for me, and I will not hide that from you—but the dragon's eye saw my intention. Without a word of warning those fish-fins of hers darted out, and I was scratched—oh, but it is no laughing matter, scratched in a way that only time will cure."

I glanced at Serafino's face and down it were half-a-dozen or more long red marks.

"Santa Pretorina," he exclaimed, "how that woman reviled me. 'Signor Poli forsooth!' cried she, 'who but he has been driven from his home by those who will bring destruction upon the town, and he has gone, leaving not so much as a *soldo* in the house, nor food.'

"And from what I could make out of her spluttering talk," added Serafino, "It seems that Signor Poli owed her a year's wages, and was gone, like a thief, away from Corte, never to return. I was the first upon whom her wrath fell, and may I face a thousand men before I meet such another enemy as Signor Poli's housekeeper."



When Serafino had ended his story his high spirits came back to him, but it was clear that the notary had fled, dreading the vengeance of the three bandits whom he had betrayed. Massoni, whose anger against him was deepest, for all the silence he kept over it, had gone in the direction of Bastia to seek him—and it needed not to doubt what Massoni's vengeance would mean. However, Angellone—this was the more frequently used name for the notary—had disappeared, and walking away from the tavern which Serafino declared was too pleasant a place to leave, Cesario and I talked upon the subject of my cousin's crimes, and the disastrous results to me which would follow the stealing of my father's will.

“Fabiani and his son have joined with the Genoese, as I told you,” said Cesario, “and this is no time for trusting to the laws for help. What the end of the revolt will be no man in Corsica can tell, but we have valiant leaders, and the sacred cause of liberty to fight for.”

And then we went together up the steep hill to the fortress, seeing how fierce had been the onslaught upon it, and what damage the strong walls had sustained. There was the grated window of the cell where we had been imprisoned, and passing in by the gates which men were busily engaged in repairing and restoring to their positions, Cesario and I went through the narrow passages and out on to the keep, from whence we could see the



town lying at our feet, the gathering patriots making its ordinarily quiet streets gay with movement and sound. In an open space at a little distance were men going through some warlike exercises, and over the keep fluttered the long-hidden flag of Corsica. Strong hands were fortifying the castle, and stout hearts kept watch and ward, and as we gazed around there came floating up to us the refrain of that song I had heard first when I met Serafino in the mountains, and his leather lungs had poured out "*Eterna faremo vendetta*," until the rocks re-echoed the words.

Cesario has been made a colonel, as I have said, and it was in his company that I was enrolled as a soldier, when after our visit to the castle, we went down into the town. There was no change, however, in his dress, nor in mine, to distinguish us, nor were those who flocked to join the standard of revolt marked out from their countrymen except by the enthusiasm which made each a gallant warrior. Love for his family—love for his country, served doubly to replace the absence of glittering uniforms, and long-suffered oppression made every Corsican a deadly foe to his oppressors, for from Corte marched an army which even the Genoese rulers of the island dreaded to encounter. I heard of assistance being asked of and expected from the King of Spain, but of this I can only repeat what Cesario told me. I remember that by public decree the image of the Holy Virgin was displayed on our



banners, and under this the Corsicans were to fight many a bloody battle, and conquer in them too. I remember the crush and turmoil which never ceased, day nor night, in Corte, whilst we lingered there impatiently preparing for the campaign against our enemies, and the many straits we were put to in finding provisions.

And a great deal more than this I might relate of that insurrection and its leaders, were it my purpose so to do. But I am more concerned in relating my own share in it and the never-to-be-forgotten adventures wherein my companions and I took part, together with the marvellous events that marked its ending, and therefore I will not pause to describe more than how some days after my return to Corte, I marched out of the town with Cesario Arrighi at the head of our troop, and Serafino who was the most stalwart sergeant ever seen in Corsica, keeping what order he could amongst us.



## CHAPTER XVI.

### HOW WE TOOK ALERIA.

**T**HROUGH the country we went, encamping at nightfall without fear or thought of being surprised or attacked by the enemy, and the next day continued our march towards the fortress of Aleria, which was strongly garrisoned by the Genoese. The revolt was spreading quickly, and news came that already Ajaccio was threatened by the Corsicans, and that Bonefacio and Calvi were in hourly expectation of an attack by our fellow patriots, led by the gallant Giafferi against the latter place, he having returned to the island whilst the council of war was being held at Corte.

It was midday when the Corsicans came within sight of the fortress Aleria, and a halt was called. In the same rank as I had marched Massoni—he had been unsuccessful in his search for Angellone, as might have been expected—and Vincenzo with Gaspero at his side, and we were merry enough. Of Cesario I had seen but little, he keeping at the head of the company, but Serafino was for ever forgetting his new position of sergeant, joining in



the ranks quite regardless of discipline. Indeed, of this latter there was very little, each of us doing as it pleased him, our commanders fully satisfied by the quick advance we made toward the first struggle with the Genoese. That Serafino and his companions, Massoni and Cesario, were banished and sentenced to death, was overlooked and forgotten, I suppose, by the leaders of the revolt, for how else could Cesario have been given the office of Colonel. Nor were these the only bandits who had come from their hiding-places to fight against the common enemy, for one was pointed out to me whom people called Bracciamozzo—which means cripple-armed—who had done worse things than Serafino or my other friends. I recollect seeing him striding away with the rest of us, his stony face thrust forward, his skull that was the shape of a negro's, being thick enough to have been used as an anvil. Why I say this is because before that day was over of which I am writing, Bracciamozzo showed the strength and thickness of his skull once and for ever to us, who were near him later on. They said that he had rid himself of twelve men in his vendetta, and this in less than two years, which time he had been alone in the mountains.

Gaspero and Vincenzo talked together I remember, each having a thousand grievances against the Genoese tax-gatherers, whilst Massoni held silence as he paced grim-faced beside them. He was always somewhat morose, and since his imprisonment in the



castle of Corte seemed to have lost the power of speech well nigh; so I was left to Serafino who talked and laughed during the march unceasingly.

"This campaign," he told me behind his great hand, "ought to bring me great honour and richness, for it is in my mind to capture Felix Pinelli single-handed. He that is governor of Bastia and has a heart like the very rock itself. Give me the chance and he shall be my prisoner—he served a kinsman of mine scurvily only a year since, and I will call that to mind when my grasp is upon Felix Pinelli."

"Is this fortress of Aleria a strong place?" I asked. "How many Genoese are there defending it, think you?"

"Report says it is as full as a wasp's nest," he answered. "and because it stands awkwardly on the road to Bastia, it is best to destroy it and those who are behind its walls at the same time. As to how many there may be of them, I did not trouble to enquire. What I have said, was told me by a toothless old fellow in Corte, who was so aged that he could talk of events that happened a hundred years ago when the Greeks were here—of Stephanopolus, their leader, and of the Turks, who drove the Mainotes from their home on the Gulf of Colocynthia, and a score of other things, but being obliged to mumble out his words the tottering old man may have told lies for ought I know. Holy Santa Francesco of Persia, but this talking makes one



like a parched chestnut, so here's to the health of every man within hearing," and Serafino put his wine gourd to his mouth, handing me the vessel presently and what remained in it, which to tell the truth was but a scanty sup.

It was midday then when we gained a view of Aleria, with its gaunt castle frowning at us from the distance, the ensign of Genoa waving blood-red against the green of the trees. It was scarcely more than a huge tower, built foursided, but its strength might prove very great, and a consultation was held by our leaders as to the attack. We had no artillery, therefore the castle would have to be carried by assault, and for that purpose scaling ladders had been brought. We numbered at most not more than two hundred men, the rest of the insurgents who had gathered in Corte having departed, some in the direction of Ajaccio, and some toward Calvi, leaving a strong force to guard Corte itself. The duty of reducing Aleria had been given to us, and I doubt whether better men could have been chosen for the task than my comrades. There was very little talk now, every eye and thought being upon that grim fortress which was to be wrested from our enemies. There was the chance moreover, that a force might be marching from Bastia against us, and for that reason no time was lost in attacking the stronghold. Already the conflict had begun, for a cannon shot came growling through the air, and then another which buried itself in the earth that



showered upon Gaspero as he stooped to fasten a strap on his boot. Cesario passed along our ranks, calling me to follow him, and I stepped along by his side.

"There is other business than getting killed here, for you and me," he said. "Fabiani and his son are in Bastia. I heard that in Corte; and so keep beside me, Camilla, for we have to speak with Fabiani Brasco before long."

I forget what I answered, being too excited by the prospect that was before us, doubting whether even our two hundred men could capture the castle. The walls, buttressed at the corners, went up to the height of twenty feet or higher, forming a rampart before the tower, which stood within and was double the height of the outer walls. By Cesario's order we separated into six companies, and using every point of defence which the trees and uneven surface of the earth offered us ran forward, losing a few of our men the while, for the cannonade was briskly maintained from the castle, and at last were close to the walls, safe from the shots that went screaming and growling over our heads harmlessly.

The outer walls were without loopholes, neither was there any sign of entrance through them; sheer upward they went, smooth and bare, and I could see that a distance of a dozen yards or less lay between them and the stout fortress within the square; and from the summit of the fortress, from



deep-set casemates, from behind the shelter of a little tower that rose at the point where the square turned, there was poured upon us volley after volley of musketry shot. But we were so closely huddled beneath the rampart that the fire did no execution amongst us, and with a few sharp words of command, all four sides were attacked at once. The scaling ladders were reared, and for all that Cesario had warned me to preserve my life, he was the first to risk his. The tall ladder had no sooner rested itself against the wall, than with a shout answered again and again by his eager followers Cesario was climbing up it, and every step gave foothold to another brave man. So great was the weight upon the ladder that it bent and swayed, yet of that none of the eager assailants gave heed, and it was when Cesario's hands were clinging to the top of the wall that I found myself mid-way after him, using the brawny shoulder of a companion as a help toward the summit. There was a fierce struggle to reach this and the ladder was creaking and bending, threatening every instant to fall under the great weight that was upon it; but as it seemed sinking beneath my feet, I was on the topmost step, with Cesario's hands on my wrists—and then I was beside him, seeing a crowd of our fellow-soldiers on the wall that was on our right, who had gained the summit a few seconds before us, and were dragging up their heavy ladder in order to descend into the square.



Like thick hail the musket balls fell upon and around us, and recalling to mind these few breathless moments when with Cesario like one possessed with fury beside me, we stood bare and defenceless upon the top of the wall, exposed to the volleying musketry, I have marvelled that even one of us escaped death. As it was, the men fell quickly, rolling off from the wall, with strange, unnatural sounds or in silence, as the case might be, but having their places filled the next instant by their comrades. Then we had hoisted the ladder, and lowered it into the inner side of the square, whilst down it we poured, and with the eagerness of wild beasts for their prey had reached the main fortress.

The entrance was by a stout gate, guarded by thick iron bars and studded with huge nail heads; and before this from each side did we flock. Those of the enemy who had resisted our approach, and had been stationed upon the walls, had disappeared like a fleck of froth upon the sea sands, trampled and beaten into nothingness by the first who had gained the summit of the rampart, and we were unhindered in our assault upon the entrance, but the gate was so strongly built that it resisted the attack for some moments. We were too close to the fortress for those defending it to fire upon us, and for a time there was opportunity to note what was passing around me. I saw Cesario, his eyes glistening with enthusiasm, ordering the attack upon the gate, and above the din of voices and



heavy trampling of feet, Serafino's voice rang out loudly. Beside me was Massoni, his face all blood-stained, and with him Bracciamozzo, bareheaded and fierce as a bull. Of my other friends I saw nothing, and the thought that they might have fallen brought such a sudden fierce anger upon me that I forgot them and myself; the deadly encounter that would follow when the gate had fallen; all power of command over my actions, and only a wild, indescribable fury filled me, such as I had never felt before. To reach the foe, to be face to face with those whose guns had sent so many of us to death, were the only thoughts I was capable of, and then I was helping with a crowd of others in driving the heavy scaling ladder against the gate. With thunderous blows that nothing could resist for long, we sent it again and again upon the massive woodwork that answered with a dull reverberation, as the hinges were being riven from their solid hold in the stone.

Like madmen we ran the long ladder backward and forward, giving scarce room to those who were doing the like, shouting and cheering as the gate split into long jagged rents, yet holding together by its iron bands, gaining strength with every blow to make the next a heavier one—and then with a crash the gate was down and we were crowding into the fortress, fighting hand to hand with its defenders, and driving them backward to the narrow stairway, trampling over dead and wounded, amid



such cries and shouts of victory or pain that the confined space wherein we fought seemed filled with them and left no room to breathe in. There was the scent of blood on the close air, the grey walls were reddened with it, faces white with passion changed to crimson as they fell from sight; there was the strange, hissing sound when a furious fighter dealt his blows, and as upon the surface of a swift current we who had first entered that passage of ghastly death and fury were borne along. The stairway was gained, our opponents were retreating, and following them, mounting over the dead they had left, we were at the first story of the fortress.

It was from this part that the musketry fire had been the heaviest upon us and done most execution. There was room within the casemate for twenty men or more, and this space was filled with our enemies, tightly packed together. It was the remnant of those who had defended the passage, and quarter was neither expected nor asked for by either these or ourselves. A volley was poured into us as we reached the room, and if it had been possible to increase the fury of the Corsicans that useless discharge would have done so. We were demons, not human beings at that moment, and it was then that Bracciamozzo proved his strength and courage.

With a growl he thrust himself foremost of the crowd, and going on his hands and knees to escape the musket shots Bracciamozzo was in the room. I saw his stiletto flash and bury itself deep into



the breast of one of the Genoese, and the quick twisting wrench with which the weapon was withdrawn; I saw an uplifted musket crash down upon his skull and the thud was as though the blow had fallen upon stone, and yet for all that the butt of the musket splintered, Bracciamozzo remained upright. There was a gaping wound from his crown to brow, and the blood spouted out, but the next instant his stiletto had reached his assailant's heart, and as though possessed of the strength of a dozen men at once, Bracciamozzo had cleared himself of his foes for a yard around him. I saw all this as one sees a flash of summer lightning, and then we were in the room, slaying our enemies. There was no space for firearms to be used, but face to face, and hand to hand, dagger and sword did their work. How long that deadly struggle lasted I cannot say, but suddenly there was a silence. Bleeding and breathless I reeled against the side of the room that was filled with the dead and dying and heard Cesario's hoarse voice in my ear.

I know not what he said, but I guessed his meaning—there was more fighting higher up in the fortress and the aid of all who remained able to give it was needed there. Slipping across the blood-stained floor, stumbling over a body that writhed as my foot touched it, seeing remembered faces pass me that seemed as if they had returned from the grave, and with a confused sense of pain about me I followed him, casting one look behind me at a



sight which I can never forget. The noise of battle had gone, the strife and tumult were ended, and a quietude more awful and impressive than these had come. How many lay dead in heaps, friend and foe together, I cannot say, and the shafts of sunlight that entered through the window of the room, rested upon their gashed and bleeding bodies mournfully. And crouched against the wall as though preparing for his deadly spring upon the foe, was Bracciamozzo, his blood-stained skull turned from me a little. Cesario was calling me by my name, but I paused for a second to put my hand on the fellow, and as I did this he rolled over, showing his rent and reeking breast and face, and the glazed eyes that glowed blindly up to mine were the most horrible sight I beheld during that time of horror and bloodshed.

Upon the roof of the fortress the remnant of its Genoese garrison stood at bay, and the most desperate encounter of that day was in full progress as I ran up the steps leading to the roof, but the press of my companions was so great at this point that I was unable to join Cesario who had gained a position higher up. The Genoese were defending the approach to their retreat, and again and again we were driven backward, each repulse being followed by a fiercer assault than the previous one. There was a short flight of wooden steps rising from the spot I had reached and it was at the top of these that death was busiest. In a mass so



compact that their weapons were useless, stood the Corsicans, maybe thirty of them; upon the wooden steps and through the opening above them were the last of the garrison, hewing at the first ranks of their foe, slashing and thrusting deep into the mass of men that were forced tightly up by those below; and those of the Genoese who could find no space for swordwork, fired upon us from over their companions' shoulders and through every opening in which a musket could be aimed. Our men were falling in clusters, and in that confined space the firing created such confusion by its thundering reports, that it deafened me.

Yet to gain that last retreat of the Genoese and finish the slaughter of them, was the purpose of every Corsican, and though death was thinning our ranks each moment, and sickening wounds made many a valiant fighter helpless, we strove on. I was on the steps, seeing through the smoke the brawny figure of Serafino above me, and then with a hoarse cheer there was a sudden rush upward, a momentary resistance at the opening, the falling back of blood-stained corpses—and we had gained the roof at last.

Then with a quickness almost incredible our foe had gone. Crashing down from each side of the square roof the Genoese were hurled, and this by less than their own number of assailants. There were thirty of the garrison, and not more than twenty Corsicans had succeeded in reaching them. But



they were twenty men, maddened with the sight of blood, strong as giants with rage and burning for revenge; and stabbed backward to the low parapet, the last of the garrison were sent headlong to the earth, and the Corsicans were masters of the fortress.

Of its former guardians not one remained alive, their dead bodies lying within and without the bloodreeking walls, but our victory had been dearly bought—of the two hundred who had begun the assault scarcely a hundred witnessed its ending. With a gashed throat Vincenzo was discovered beneath a heap of slain, and lying at the foot of the wooden steps I found Gaspero dying. He tried to speak to me but had not strength remaining even for that, and I crossed his hands as the last spark of life fled.

I found Cesario in the lower part of the fortress, and with him Serafino who was bandaging his own wounds in a clumsy fashion, holding one end of the strip of linen with his teeth, and he gave a mumbling kind of cheer as I came into the room.

"You are one of those who have got through to-day with your life," he cried as best he could with that mouthful of linen between his teeth. "I made sure a lank Genoese had spitted you—he was doing his best to that end."

"I do not remember it," I answered wearily, for my strength was spent. "Why did he not kill me?"

"Cesario will tell you," grinned Serafino, and I glanced at our newly-made colonel.



"'Twas nothing," replied he, "and there are more important matters to talk about than a lean Genoese or two."

"Nothing, say you?" exclaimed Serafino, who had bound up one wound and was regarding the next thoughtfully. "If you had saved my life as you saved Camilla's, noble Colonel Arrighi, I should call it a very important matter."

I tried to speak the thanks that were in my heart. I recollected the tall Genoese now and how his sword had nearly reached my throat when we were fighting on the steps, and how he had fallen backward with a choking cry, struck dead by my unknown preserver. Yet even in the act of recalling the event, my memory went straying again. I was wounded, and Serafino, when he had ended his own bandaging, helped to dress my hurts; but of our state when the fierce fighting was over I need not stay to describe.

Our first work was to restore the gate to its position, for we might have the task of defending our prize before long possibly, and when the heavy woodwork had been raised and secured we sacked the castle, finding ample supplies of food and wine, and with these we refreshed ourselves. And then by Cesario's order we drew up, maimed and bruised, ragged and besmirched, beneath the walls of the rampart, in a disorderly row.

We numbered seventy-five, and some of the brave Corsicans who answered to their name. uttered



it with their last breath, falling dead as they spoke. Five there were who died thus, and those who answered not were dead already, their blood soaking the earth or staining the steps and passages of the fortress their gallantry had helped to conquer.



## CHAPTER XVII.

### IN BASTIA.

**W**E remained two days at Aleria, when a reinforcement from Corte joined us, and under the command of one of the chief men in the insurrection quitted the fortress, after setting fire to it. We had buried the slain, friend and foe together, and those whose wounds were most severe, found a resting place and ready helpers in a village at some short distance from Aleria.

"We have more work at hand waiting to be done," Serafino told me as I marched along beside him, "Yet I doubt whether it will be harder to accomplish than the taking of the fortress yonder," and he pointed to where the thick smoke clouds marked the place of our stern and bloody victory. "It was a tough tree to fell."

"What work do you mean?" I asked, "and which way are we going to it?"

"Nothing less than subduing the town of Bastia," he answered. "It is the prospect of doing that which makes me forget the smarting of my wounds."



Felix Pinelli shall know more of me ere long than will be pleasant to him."

"Bastia is my birthplace," I replied, "and I can remember my father's house there.—It stood not far from the sea, and before it was the great rock shaped like a lion."

"Is that all you recollect of Bastia?" he asked, "because I wish to learn all I can of the place. Where does the governor live?"

"I cannot tell you that," I answered. "I was taken away from the town when a child and have never seen it since."

"Then I must hunt for Felix," said Serafino in his firm voice, "after we have taken Bastia."

"It will be more difficult to do that than capturing Aleria was," I answered. "You speak as though you were certain we can take the town."

"How else would you have me speak," he replied. "This is not the first time that I have considered the matter of conquering Bastia, for when there was nothing else to occupy my thoughts, they always went towards Felix Pinelli, as a compass points to the north. My kinsman told me that Felix had the most horrible squint in all Corsica, so it will be no very hard task to recognise him," and with this Serafino began humming the tune of a song, that was worse to hear than his singing.

Onward we marched, with the solemn mountains on one side of us, and the tranquil country on the other, passing vineyards and olive grounds amid



which here and there stood houses of fanciful shape, and away in the blue distance was a solitary watch tower. The road was a toilsome one, going now between bramble hedges, and then stretching upward upon the bare rock, with only a ruined chapel, ivy-covered and desolate, to break the dull monotony of the scene, until at last the road brought us in view of Bastia, which rises from the sea in the form of an amphitheatre, terrace above terrace. From the point at which we had arrived we could look down upon the town, and a faint remembrance of my childhood's days came back to me. There was the little harbour with the quay stretched like a finger into the water—there were the lion-shaped rock, and the little lighthouse, and upon the rock the dismal fort built by the Genoese hundreds of years ago, a place wherein many a noble patriot had pined till death gave him liberty.

The order was given to halt, and gladly did I obey, for my feet were aching with the toilsome march we had made, and very quickly such provisions as we had brought were being prepared for our evening meal. It was a picturesque scene we presented, for a thousand or more men were scattered in groups upon the ground and the hum of voices enlivened the desolate district. At a little way from the spot where I with a number of others sat, was a white-walled building which one of my company told me was the convent of Sant Antonio, and in the evening glow I saw two monks sitting in the



porch. There was a little chapel close by the convent, and from the former came some black-veiled nuns who passed into the building, and so peaceful was the picture that it was difficult to think that within half a mile of that calm retreat, lay a host of men intent upon battle and bloodshed.

However, I had little time to consider that, for I was hungry and eager for supper. Serafino was busily preparing a savoury mess over the fire we had lighted, and very soon we had forgotten the stern business before us, and that of a certainty our supper was the last many of us would eat. I did not know the place which our leader had prepared for the attack upon Bastia, but it would not be long delayed I was assured. We had brought the cannons taken from Aleria, together with all the arms which we found stored there, and every Corsican's heart was beating with expectation at the glorious struggle before us.

Serafino was in the midst of a long story, telling it as only he could, and Massoni who had been badly hurt in the attack upon the fortress, lay beside me nursing a wounded hand, when a man came hastily to us asking for me. Serafino pointed to where I was sitting and the messenger whispered in my ear.

"You are wanted by General Caporali," he said. "Come with me. He has something to ask you."

I got up, wondering what our leader could want with such an one as myself, yet I asked the mes-



senger no questions. Through the camp I followed him, coming at length to where three or four officers were sitting, and with these was Cesario, who gave me a smile, and then one of the officers called me to come to him.

"You are a native of Bastia," he said abruptly. "Will you go into the town and get what information you can upon certain matters."

"I am ready," I answered, "but it is a long time ago since I was in Bastia. I recollect my way through some of the streets—no more."

"That will suffice," he replied. "Colonel Arrighi will accompany you, and the quicker the information is brought to us, the sooner will the attack be made. Colonel Arrighi has chosen you to be his guide and speaks well of you."

I gave a little bow, and glanced at Cesario who laughed again.

"I will tell you our business, Camilla," he said quietly. "We have a difficult errand before us, let me say at once, yet I do not think you will shrink from going through it with me," and then he took me aside a little, saying that we were to act as spies, and find out what force the governor had to defend Bastia with, and further to enlist support from those of the inhabitants who might be willing to give it us, together with other things which I need not refer to here. We were to start on our errand so soon as darkness had set in, and beyond all I was to hold my peace as to the project.



It was arranged that Cesario and I should meet each other at a certain part of the encampment nearest the town, and from there get into Bastia as best we might. It was a dangerous attempt to make, and going back to my companions I wished very much that I might have asked advice from Serafino, whose wits were the readiest of anyone's in the little army. But I had promised to keep the affair secret, and so held my peace, eating my supper with as much calmness as I could, and joining in the merry talk. Then by degrees that died away, for most of the men were tired and sleepy, and choosing the opportunity when Serafino had gone over to a neighbouring camp fire I made my way to the spot which Cesario had appointed for our meeting, finding him already there and ready for the start.

The moon was rising over the mountains, and a soft wind blew landward from the sea. Behind and on either side darkness had spread, but before us the twinkling lights of Bastia showed the goal to which we bent our steps. Once in the town we should be comparatively safe—our danger lay in passing the sentries that guarded the gateway of the fortifications facing us. We could distinguish the line of high wall encircling the town, and the towers that flanked the entrance through them which loomed up black against the lighter sky, and toward these we went until we were within a few yards of them. And then a piece of the most wonderful good



fortune that ever befell happened, for as we stood considering a plan of gaining admittance, there came from the gateway the sounds of voices in angry dispute, amongst them being the shrill tones of a woman; whilst to add to the uproar an ass sent out at that instant such a bray that it might have been heard at the camp. Creeping cautiously forward we saw in the light cast from a lantern that hung over a sentry-box, the figures of a soldier barring the further progress of a small cart in which sat a muffled figure. What the dispute was about I shall never know, but it was plainly to be seen that the market-woman had returned to Bastia after the time for closing the gates. The voices rose higher and higher, and then, as though impatient at it, the sentry opened one of the heavy doors, whereupon the driver of the cart drove forward, but she had scarcely done this when the ponderous gate came swinging back, catching the cart which creaked under the sudden pressure. And there, held as in a vice, was the infuriated virago, with the donkey struggling as though a dozen dogs were at its heels, and the sentry swearing lustily at the mishap, making altogether such a hubbub as I could never fitly describe. Cesario and I were not half-a-dozen yards from the spot, lurking under the shadow of the wall, and for a moment we watched the little scene.

“Here is our chance, Camilla,” whispered Cesario excitedly. “There are none to stop us from helping



the woman and getting the cart free. Quick then," and we were at the gates almost before he had finished speaking.

The enraged market-woman was belabouring the sentry and the donkey in turns as we reached the spot, and never shall I forget her scream of surprise as Cesario, leaping on the cart, had disappeared into the dark through the half open gate, nor the sentry's yell as I followed. I did not mean hurt to anyone, and if the woman had remained sitting all would have been well with her, but just as I was in the act of leaping after Cesario, she rose to strike at him with her whip, and so it happened that I came full against her. Over I went, headlong, alighting on the stony road, and forward went the woman over the donkey, but where the sentry went or what was the result of a blow which I had given him seeing his threatening face in the light of the lantern, I cannot say. The noise, however, was redoubled, and the heavy tramp of approaching feet warned us of danger, so slipping down a narrow alley which was close by, Cesario and I ran swiftly out of earshot of the uproar.

"Whoever the woman is, she ought to be made a saint and canonized for the good turn she has done us this night," exclaimed Cesario as we stopped to get breath.

"And the donkey too," I answered, "for if it had not been stubborn beyond every other donkey in Corsica it would have pulled the cart free."



“And now,” went on Cesario, “that we are in Bastia, let us get to work, and the saints make it as easy to get out as it was to get into the town. But there will be warm search made after us, Camilla, and therefore we will get to another part of the town with all speed.”

We felt safe in passing through the streets, for our appearance would give rise to no suspicions. We were not known, nor could our errand be guessed, and we kept walking onward until the lower portion of Bastia which is called Terra Vochia was come to. The upper part that surrounds the Leone fortress is called Terra Nuova, and connecting these two districts are terraces of houses, having gaudily shaded balconies, and above the town rise the green sloped mountains with many a citron and almond grove. The picture came back to my mind, as I remembered seeing it long ago with childish eyes, and glancing down at the little harbour I seemed to see the ship which my father had told me years since, was his, and that one day I should go on a voyage with him.

The streets were thronged and it was plainly to be noticed that the approach of the insurgents had created a great deal of alarm and excitement amongst the townspeople. Most of these were foreigners, at least we judged this by the uncouth talk we heard, and the feeling for the greater part was against the Corsicans. The governor was praised by a loudly speaking group who sat outside



a wine shop into which Cesario and I went; and Hyacinthus Paoli together with the other leaders of the revolt were abused soundly. More than this we learnt that a strong body of troops were to arrive from Genoa, and that Germany had been asked to lend aid in quelling the insurrection.

Cesario and I sat at a little table, drinking our wine and listening to the vapouring talk, straining our ears to catch any matter of importance which might be discussed. For a quarter of an hour maybe did we remain thus, and were about to continue our walk, when suddenly Cesario who had half risen from his seat dropped into his chair again, and his cheeks had turned pale.

"Look this way," he hissed out, "away from the door, Camilla."

"Why should I do so?" I asked, surprised at his fierce words. "Who is there to recognise me?"

"Fabiani Brasco has just joined the group by the table yonder," he answered behind his hand, and then for a moment or two I had no power to reply; but in spite of Cesario's warning I gave a hasty glance round to see my cousin's face not six yards from me.

He was dressed as I remembered seeing him last, and a belt was round his waist from which clattered a sword. Those at the table greeted him cordially, making room for him, and Fabiani sat down with his back to me. I had not been recognised as yet, but what would assuredly happen to my companion



and myself if my cousin denounced us was easy to foretell. It would mean our instant arrest and certain execution.

These thoughts flashed through my mind, and I saw Cesario's hand on the handle of a pistol which was beneath his coat. There was an angry gleam in his eyes which seemed to have lost their sight for everything but that stalwart figure at the table beyond us, whose fingers were grasping a wine cup and whose tongue was busy with news of importance.

"Remember Nasone's request to you," I said hastily to my companion, placing my hand on his. "There will come another opportunity, Cesario, and we have much to do."

Cesario drew his hand back reluctantly, keeping his glance upon Fabiani. "Yes, there *must* come my chance," he muttered, "but patience is needed now." And then we were silent, and my thoughts went backward and forward between the recollection of the last time I had encountered my cousin and the best way to evade his recognition of me now.

"We must get away from here, Cesario," I said in a low undertone. "How is it to be done without danger?"

"There is a door yonder," he replied carelessly. "It may lead to greater risk for what I know, but we will go from the place through it." And he got to his feet. I arose also, and we had reached the doorway, Cesario had passed onward and I was



following him, when Fabiani twisted round on his chair, and as I disappeared a cry of surprise from him told me only too surely that he had seen and recognised me.

We went hurriedly along a narrow passage, finding ourselves at last in a garden attached to the wine shop, and scrambling through a hedge which divided the piece of land from the road Cesario and I proceeded upward toward the Terra Nuova without any further adventure. Here, as in the lower part of the town, the bustle and excitement were very marked, and without trouble we learnt everything which we desired to know: How that General Paul Battista Rivarola was to be sent forthwith from Genoa with all the troops which could be raised there, and as though to balance that in our favour the Germans had refused assistance to the Genoese, having their own troubles in Poland to attend to. These things and many others formed the subjects of conversation amongst the townspeople; and during the time that we listened in taverns, at the corners of streets, at open windows or wherever a throng had gathered, we were unquestioned and disregarded.

We had spent some hours in obtaining the information I have described and then we resolved to return to the camp, but how that was to be done safely neither Cesario nor I could see.

"There will be no more market-women's carts fixed in the gate," I said, assuming an easy speech for all my anxiety. "Say then, Cesario, how is it to be?"



Cesario shrugged his shoulders. "There is only one way that presents itself," he answered, "and that is to scale the wall and trust to the saints for reaching the other side of it without a bullet through our heads."

There really was no other method of escape, and I had such trust in my companion's courage and readiness that the plan he proposed seemed already executed; so we decided upon walking a little further and then to retrace our steps toward a part of the fortifications that was at a good distance from the entrance into Bastia.

We had performed our dangerous task in safety thus far, gaining information that would be of the greatest service to the leaders of the besieging army, and now all that remained was to escape with our lives from the town. Keeping a keen watch on either hand we made for the fortifications that were clearly marked out in the light of the full moon, when suddenly upon the still air there broke the dull boom of a cannon.

"What does the firing mean, Cesario?" I cried. "Hark!" and again the heavy sound came rolling dully through the night air.

For an instant we stood listening, and I was on the point of moving forward again when from out the shadow of some tree two men stepped up to us, and one of them, laying his hand on my shoulder, called me by name, giving a harsh laugh as he did this.



## CHAPTER XVIII.

### WE ARE ARRESTED.

**W**ITH speechless surprise I saw before me the unexpected features of Teodor Brasco, and slinking behind his shoulder was Signor Poli who stood rubbing his hands together, keeping a furtive glance upon Cesario.

"I never thought to have had this pleasure," exclaimed the notary, edging further back from us. "Because there was a rumour that you had fallen into the hands of your enemies, Signor Arrighi. The news gave me much grief, and I have never ceased to mourn for you."

"Yes, that was the talk about you and your companion, Camilla," added Teodor. "'Twas said you had been condemned to be hanged."

"Times are changed," I answered. "There may be others of whom such things may be said presently, and more truthfully," and I gave a look at the notary.

Teodor laughed again, and during the talk Cesario had kept silence. I understood his reason for that; a struggle or quarrel would have brought a crowd round us, and it was best to be wary.



"To think you should be in Bastia," exclaimed the notary who seemed to dread the ominous silence of Cesario, and therefore talked volubly, "and at such a moment as this! Yet it is lucky for you and your friend"—here Signor Poli pointed toward me—"that I have met you. Strangers in the town are apt to be looked upon with suspicion. For only yesterday a harmless seller of sweet herbs was laid by the heels, and report says the governor intends hanging him to-morrow. And this man had done nothing amiss, mark you—he was a simple country-fellow."

During this harangue we had continued moving gently in the direction of the walls, and I knew that Cesario was casting his glances about, for the opportunity to evade Teodor and his companion. Signor Poli noted this also, I suppose, for he whispered in Teodor's ear, and then they both stopped across our path.

"We are not going your way, Camilla," said my kinsman, "and after such a long absence from each other I do not care to part without some further conversation with you. Walk with me, please," and he moved in the direction from whence Cesario and I had come.

There was an insolence in his request—it was almost a command—that made my flesh tingle. As yet I had scarcely answered his jeering remarks, and Cesario had maintained absolute silence. It would have been the easiest thing possible to have flung



ourselves upon Teodor and the notary, and I did not doubt what the result would have been; yet caution and watchfulness were likely to serve us better far than all the bravery in the world at that particular moment. I thought of the benefit my death would bring to Fabiani and his son; of the plot which was hatching to obtain my inheritance from me, and I gulped down the angry reply that rose to my lips as Teodor spoke.

"And Signor Arrighi will drink a cup of wine with me," said the notary, cracking his long fingers. "Oh yes—we shall be quite a merry party."

"I have my own affairs to attend to, Signor Brasco," replied Cesario sternly, and not heeding the notary more than if the fellow had been a tree stem. "Camilla has no particular desire for your company I am disposed to think, therefore you will allow us to go on peaceably."

Teodor's reply was a mocking laugh. "There are times when it is best to speak civilly, I perceive, Signor; and I for one shall do the same. Go your ways then, you and your companion."

"There are times when it is safer to speak civilly than to threaten, you might have said," retorted Cesario. "And as for you," he added, turning so fiercely upon him that the notary gave a nimble skip out of harm's way—"Well—you and I will talk to each other at a fitter moment."

"Nay, I wish no further speech with you," cried the notary, trying to assume a resolute look. "And



do not suppose that I value your angry looks. I am as brave as any man in Corsica, I feel my heart beating like a lion's when I think of what may be before me—I lived too long in Corte—I suffered myself too long to be despitefully treated, but I have exchanged my pen for a sword—aye, here it is,” and Signor Poli held out a puny little bodkin of a sword that would have served better for cutting his meat than carving an enemy. Not content with this, the vain-glorious notary must needs strut to and fro in the moonlight, holding his black gown in a bunch behind his back, so that he looked for all the world like a lean, long-legged fowl crowing defiance at midnight, and he was doing this when from out the shadow of a big cork tree sprang the figure of a woman, who with a wild cry had seized him by the arm before he could escape.

“Have I found thee at last then,” screamed the woman, disregarding the spectators. “High and low have I been to discover you, Signor Poli,” and she gave him such a vigorous shake that his wig came awry with its curly tail bow over his startled eyes.

“Holy Sante Caris-s-s-ima,” shouted the notary. “How have you got to Bastia, woman? I left you safely in Corte and told no one of my coming here. Good, patient Griseldino, loose your hold on my arm, for your fingers bite like a tarantula.”

“How came I into Bastia, do you ask?” cried Griseldino, getting a firmer grip of him. “What matters that to you? I had rather say how you



stole away from your house, leaving not a *soldo* nor trace of food in it, and owing me the wages of full six months. So back to Corte you shall come with me forthwith."

"The she-dragon of whom Serafino told us," whispered Cesario to me; "look at the brave notary now."

"But how did you reach Bastia?" exclaimed Signor Poli in a faint voice, casting an appealing look round at Teodor and ourselves.

"In the market cart of Giovanni Lippo," shrieked the patient Griseldino, "whose fiend of a donkey seemed turned into a statue at the entrance to the town. The miscreant sentry had opened the gate when suddenly it fell to upon the cart, and then two evil spirits came flying over my head, carrying off my *mantile*<sup>1</sup> that has been lost from that instant, and frightening the ass so greatly that the stubborn beast ran away with Giovanni Lippo's cart, leaving me on the stones of the road."

Cesario and I, although every moment was of the greatest importance to us, waited for Griseldino to end her story, and then we went swiftly away from the spot, and how the notary fared I cannot say. There was sterner work on hand than even the exciting encounter between the notary and his housekeeper, for the booming of cannon had grown into a continuous roar, and mingled with it came the sharp volleying of musketry from the distance.

<sup>1</sup> The head-covering of Corsican women.



There was the sound of hurrying footsteps and loud cries in the town, and the sturdy tramp of armed men. Lights flickered here and there from the watch towers upon the fortifications, and joining in a crowd that was streaming in the direction of the entrance to Bastia, we learnt that a *sortie* had been made by the garrison upon the Corsican encampment, and that a deadly battle was in progress it required no one to tell us.

A company of soldiers was passing through the gateway as Cesario and I came within sight of it, and we hastened our steps.

"We can get past the sentries maybe," said Cesario. "That is our only chance of escape from the place. Quick then, Camilla; join with the ranks that are going out. Bend your face downward—Fabiani Brasco is in the crowd—his glance fell on you a moment since."

I stooped my head and together we pressed into the ranks of the soldiers who were passing out to engage in the conflict, the sounds of which rose and fell over the town, but at the very moment when deliverance from our dangerous situation was almost gained, a little knot of men suddenly stood before us, and Fabiani Brasco's outstretched hand pointed at me.

"That is the fellow," he said, "He has come as a spy from the rascally army of rebels;" and I was in the grasp of strong hands ere I could utter a word of reply. There was a scuffle and the sight



of a man staggering backward, and then Cesario and I, in the midst of an angry throng, were being hurried through the streets, closely guarded.



## CHAPTER XIX.

### A RACE FOR LIFE.

**A**LTHOUGH the noise of a thousand tongues seemed in the air, and the confusion around us was increasing every instant, I heard Cesario's whispered words with strange distinctness as we sped along, but for all that I tried to answer him I could not. The news of our arrest had brought a concourse of people together, so that more than once our progress was stopped. It was at one of these stoppages that I saw Teodor's face leering at me, and heard his jeering voice, as he spoke to Fabiani, who frowned and cursed the people impeding the prisoners. There was a curiosity in my mind as to what had become of the notary, and then I recollected the coming of Signor Poli's housekeeper.

But I thought and saw all these things as if I were in a dream, from which I awoke to find myself with Cesario in a vaulted courtyard, hearing some heavy doors close behind us with a sound like thunder, shutting out the babble of the crowd, so that a sullen silence rested upon us, disturbed only



by the trampling of feet. Here we stood for a few moments, still guarded, and presently were conducted up some stone steps to a room where sat a soldierly looking man at a table, and leaning over this in the act of speaking was my cousin, the officer keeping his stern glance on Cesario and myself the while he listened. Then he addressed us.

"You are denounced as rebels," he began, "and as spies moreover."

Fabiani had turned, straightening himself as he faced me.

"This fellow's name is Camilla Negroni," he said; "the other has been already condemned by the law. He is Cesario Arrighi, the outlaw."

"You have witnesses to prove that," answered the officer.

"Two. They are here," and Fabiani beckoned with his hand. "Two whose evidence is clear," and I saw Teodor and the notary come forward to the table. The latter's long coat was rent at the shoulders and there were red marks down his face, such as Serafino had shown us on his.

"You know these men?" asked the officer sharply.

"Know them indeed, most honourable general," exclaimed the notary. "That do I well, and a pair of blood-thirstier ruffians never stepped. Cesario Arrighi has done me more harm than you could have patience to hear, and as for the other, whose name, most noble general, is Camilla Negroni, he



has already attempted the life of this gentleman"—he pointed to Teodor—"and is rife for the direst mischief against the righteous rulers of Corsica. Rank rebels both are they and dangerous withal, so that according to the statute made and provided for such fellows, which was enacted in the year 1702, there needs but a speedy hanging of them. And furthermore it is ordained that those who bring damage and hurt to their fellow-subjects shall be called upon to make such damage good."

The officer gave a frown of enquiry.

"You have a long tongue," he said. "What particular hurt have these men done you?"

"The letting loose of a lunatic beast of prey on me," cried the notary. "A woman, valiant general, in whose clutches they left me, and had not my guardian Saint been quicker to rescue than the lunatic to destroy I should be dead instead of alive at this moment. For to be brief, my coat was rent as you see it, my flesh sorely scratched by the said lunatic, in the fear of whom I go continually; and the further reading of the statute——"

"Oh, a pest on your statutes!" exclaimed the officer, interrupting the notary's speech roughly. "That these men are spies is sufficient for me. You vouch for their being such?" and he turned to Teodor.

"What my father has told you, I vouch for as being true," answered Teodor. "This Camilla Negroni is likely to do further mischief if he be not checked,



and the other—Cesario Arrighi—and he are in Bastia to obtain information to be used against the rulers of Corsica.”

His glance met Fabiani's as he ceased, and a look of deepest meaning passed between them. The notary, dragging his tattered garment together, went to my cousin, and there was an evil smile of gratification on Signor Poli's face as he and those who had sworn thus against me, drew aside whispering.

Neither Cesario nor I had answered a word. It would have been quite useless, and in a few moments we were hurried away to await further examination on the morning. There was a narrow, stone-built room that opened from the vaulted courtyard, and into this we were unceremoniously thrust, our condemnation being certain.

“A glorious ending this truly,” growled Cesario, as he paced to and fro in the thin stream of light that came into the cell from a lamp in the courtyard through a square hole in the door. “Cooped up here to be presently taken out and shot. And to think Fabiani Brasco was at my mercy not two hours ago!” whilst as he said this my companion ground his teeth with anger.

“I do not think everyone is against us,” I answered. “We have a friend in Bastia unless I am mistaken. The fellow who guarded me from the room here whispered in my ear.”

“Whispering cannot help us overmuch,” replied Cesario, “yet what did he say?”



"That he would aid us," I answered. "There was no time for him to speak further." And as I said this the stream of light went out suddenly, for a man's head was at the little square hole in the door, by which the light had entered.

"Within there!" and a muffled voice came into the cell. "The one who is called Negroni."

"Yes. What do you want with me?" I answered, coming to the opening, so that I could feel the speaker's breath.

"Be ready to follow me when I give the signal," came the voice again. "There was a Negroni who saved my life years ago, and I will save yours now."

I gave a start, for the words were the sweetest surprise that ever an unfortunate man heard yet, and I asked him a question that received no answer, for the face disappeared and the tramp of the sentry was heard again.

"Cesario," I said, seizing his hand, "we are to be helped—we shall escape!" and I repeated the words I had just heard as we waited for our unknown benefactor to return. I suppose something hindered him in doing this, for it was some minutes before the light was obstructed again, and they seemed hours to us. Then we heard a soft little whistle, the rusty lock creaked, the cell door was opened the next moment, and we stepped out into the courtyard. Our deliverer was a soldier in the Genoese uniform, and without a word of explanation



he unlocked the small gate that was within the larger one which guarded the courtyard, and we found ourselves in the street.

"I would do more than even this for my country," said our deliverer as we crept along in the black shadow of some houses, "and now come with me quickly. We can get to a part where the wall is low enough to be climbed easily," and with this we hastened on, amid a strange quietude, for the townspeople had flocked from the Terra Nuova, leaving it lonely and still.

As we went along I found that the mention of my name had been the means of our finding a friend. Our guide told me in little snatches, as we walked, pausing now and again to listen, that his life had been saved by a certain Capitano Negroni, many years ago, and that the name had brought back the memory of the gallant act. Moreover he told us that he was Corsican born, for all that he was serving the oppressor as a Genoese, and that in a word, he was resolved to fight on the side of his countrymen.

These things I heard truly, but without paying much attention to them, for my whole thoughts were intent upon escaping from Bastia. Cesario was on my left hand and our guide on the right, and thus we went, averting our faces when the light of a swinging lantern or window had to be passed. The moon was at her full height, making open spaces silvery white, upon which the shadows fell



black as ink and sharply defined. We had left the busier streets behind us now, the last terrace of houses had been passed, and above this rose the uneven wall of the town, a thick grove separating it from us, through which went a thread of path, white beneath the moon beams.

"We can mount the wall midway between the two towers yonder," our guide told us; "and once upon the other side there is nothing to hinder us."

The sounds of the engagement between the Genoese and the revolting Corsicans had continued up till now, but as we approached the wall the fire slackened, a dull roar booming now and again through the air. How the battle had gone, and with what results, we were excitedly anxious to learn, and now that our escape was almost accomplished, we became reckless I suppose. Be that as it may, however, we were suddenly hailed from a little distance as we entered upon the grove I have mentioned, and giving no answer to the call, a shot came whistling over our heads. Then there was a loud shout, and into the grove we plunged, with half a dozen soldiers—I saw the glint of their arms and iron caps as the light fell on them—at our heels.

With the speed that only the dread of recapture could have given us, we ran along the path that wound in and out through the trees, hearing the heavy tread of our pursuers close behind us. Then a bullet came striking our guide upon the arm, and



he gave a scream of pain, holding the shattered limb with his uninjured hand; and a volley was poured in the direction of our road. I saw Cesario stumble and recover himself, at which panting and breathless I increased my speed until we were running shoulder to shoulder.

"Are you hurt?" I jerked out, having scarce breath to speak.

"There was the touch as of a hot iron on my neck, but it has done me no harm," he answered, almost falling again, and I put my arm round his waist. And thus running, the bullets splintering the thick leaves and sending up little dust clouds, we came at length to where the wall, which was to prove either a means of escape, or bring us to bay, stood clear out a dozen yards off.

Our guide was beside us still, holding his wounded arm, his face ghastly white with pain, and speeding forward calling us to follow, he began climbing the crumbling brickwork, making the ascent easy, and in a moment or two we were on the top of the wall, and I gave a look down into the black shadows that lay on the outer side of it.

But our pursuers had gained upon us now; they were in an excited group below, yelling threats, and the sharp report of musketry rang out; there was the passing of a heavy body by me, a dull thud from the shadows below, and then with Cesario alongside of me I was grazing down the rough wall until my feet touched earth



at last. But there were only two of us to speed down the hill to gain the spot where, at a distance of half a mile maybe, the flashing of gunshot crimsoned the sky.



## CHAPTER XX.

### THE SORTIE.

THE events that had preceded the moment when Cesario and I reached the scene of battle Massoni described to me later on. The Corsicans had been surprised and taken at a disadvantage by the Genoese; for worn by our long march that day my comrades lay resting round the camp fires, unsuspecting the approach of their enemies, and during the excitement produced by the onslaught upon them, had wavered, losing many men in the few fierce moments of confusion. Rallying quickly, a stubborn resistance was made, and a struggle for victory ensued, murderous and sanguinary beyond conception, which from the comparatively small number engaged seemed almost a succession of single combats.

The drooping of the cannon fire, which we had noticed during our escape, was caused by the great slaughter amongst our gunners, who bore the brunt of the first attack, and furthermore by the uselessness of cannon against the straggling bodies of Genoese. The Corsicans had withdrawn from the



place of their encampment, falling back in the direction of the convent of Sant Antonio; and it was at the moment when the conflict was raging at its deadliest around the white walls of the building that Cesario and I came towards the spot.

The convent was in flames that shed their lurid light over the struggling figures, which, moving amid a grim silence, for we were not yet close enough to distinguish friend from foe, made a spectacle which I shall never forget. Over the rough ground we ran, passing more than one heap of dead and wounded men huddled back together; stumbling over a body whose white face lay in the glare of the fire, and seeing many others strewn like dead leaves here and there, onward we went until wild unearthly voices could be heard amid the hissing rush of flames; voices that seemed hardly human, and high above them a word of command now and then.

Heeding nothing of these sights or sounds, however, Cesario and I made straight for the blazing convent. The chapel I have mentioned was as yet untouched, although the angry flames, driven by the wind, licked round the tiny building, threatening its destruction, whilst backed by the bright lashes of fierce light, the battle raged; dark forms in groups or singly moved hurriedly, joining for a moment and then falling asunder, lessened in numbers, for in that brief coming together of the combatants death had been busy. I could see men falling as though a reaper's sickle had mowed them down,



there were the uplifting of arms and the fall of stalwart fighters that changed from life to senseless clods of earth as by a magic, to be trodden out of human shape by their fellows, ere they themselves reeled and sank out of existence. The weird carnage came closer into view, the snarling shouts of defiance and defeat rang louder, the hissing of the flames was the roar of a furnace now, for we had reached the brink of the fighting, armed with weapons that had been snatched from the grasp of hideous dead men as we ran, and Cesario, panting and wild with excitement, had cut down an enemy who opposed us, as through a line of Genoese soldiers we hewed a path and gained a momentary respite from attack beneath the shelter of the convent porch.

“Side by side, Camilla,” he hissed—“we are safer thus.” And there was no time to answer, for like wild animals some men were upon us, and a tall fellow, his eyes and teeth gleaming white in the glare of the fire, was thrusting at me. Quick as thought I dropped on my knee, and as he lunged at my throat my sword passed through him, grazing the edge of the steel corselet beneath his upraised arm. I felt the quivering of his body run down to my hand along the sword blade, and he would have fallen upon me had I not sprung aside with a wild joy in my heart, at sight of his bent neck.

Then Cesario was beside me again, slashing and thrusting; there was the crash of his sword against an iron cap, and then he had gone, there was a



tangle of writhing bodies where our foes had stood an instant before, and I was away from the porch. The little chapel seemed to have taken its place, and it was Serafino, like some giant read of in an old fairy tale, now before me, at the entrance to the chapel, keeping back some men who would have forced by him, and in the bright light every movement was plainly to be seen. I was conscious of his recognising me, as I stooped beneath one of his assailants, driving my blade deep into the fellow's threatening sword arm, and then Serafino and I were side by side and he had done a deed such as only his strength and courage could have accomplished. Before him, fierce as a mountain bull, was a huge Genoese, armoured on head and breast, and for a moment he and Serafino had cleared a space around them. Like a flash of lightning the Genoese had brought his sword down with a sweeping cut, but throwing his bared head aside my comrade averted the deadly stroke that fell against the masonry of the doorway with a clatter of steel on stone, and Serafino recovered his position, a laugh being in his eyes. Just an instant's pause as though to calculate his reach, and with a drawing cut his sword had severed the Corsican's iron chin-strap, laying open the fellow's cheek from ear to mouth and in that brief moment I saw the man's teeth to the extremity of the jawbone. With a yell of pain and rage, the Corsican struck again and again, but his sight was hidden by a gush of blood



that came like a mask, and was cleared away from his eyes with a rapid movement of his hand. And then, quicker than words can describe the deed, my companion had leaped forward, bringing his great weight behind the deadly thrust, and through the Corsican's corselet as though it had been glass, went Serafino's sword, straight into his enemy's heart, and breaking at the hilt remained transfixed in the fallen body.

"Back!" cried Serafino, dealing blows right and left with the stiletto he had drawn from his belt. "Back into the chapel!" And we were in the building, its vaulted roof echoing with the trampling of feet over the marble floor. There were two of the Genoese soldiery who followed us, raging for revenge, having seen their comrade fall, and these were armed better than we. One had levelled his gun, but I ran forward, knocking up the piece, and as I did this Serafino had with his bare hands gripped the strap of each of the soldiers' iron cap. For a second he held the men thus, and then with a strength beyond belief he brought the two heads together—the sound of the clashing caps ringing clear above the tumult outside the chapel. Twice was this done, and the second time Serafino released the hold, as the men staggered, with blood pouring from the splintered skulls, and rolled senseless.

All these events had happened so quickly and followed one upon the other so rapidly that they seemed to pass like a dream; but with the falling



of our two enemies, there was an instant of cessation from the fighting, and Serafino called me by name, the old, cheery sound being in his voice, for all that his brow was gashed.

"Into the sacristy, Camilla," he cried; "there will be a door there by which to escape. We cannot pass out by the way we entered." And as he spoke there came a rush of fighting men, friends and foes in the deadliest encounter of the deadly battle. I caught a glimpse of Cesario fighting bravely, and of our general and one or two more, and then Serafino and I were in a place no bigger than a linen chest, having crashed our way through a door that in the uncertain light gave promise of escape. Then my companion had disappeared with a yell of wonder, and I was with him again before one could count three, some feet below the chapel floor and the dull trampling of the combatants over our heads, down in the burying place of some long-forgotten dead, where like a star on a black night twinkled the red glow of a vesper lamp. The place seen by that spot of light showed up gloomy and cavernous, with rotting coffins piled high, so that the lower ones had been flattened and crushed, making sights so hideous that though above me were bloodshed and death, they were not half so horrible as those silent mementoes of the dead that lay decayed and loathsome around.

We had fallen through a narrow trap door that guarded the steps leading down into the vault, and



with all his valour burning within him still Serafino cast a shuddering look about. "Better a dozen Genoese than this!" he exclaimed; and we were mounting the steps, breathless, in eager escape from the awful sepulchre to where above us roared the tide of battle, when down into the vault came the yell of victory and scream of defeat, and the figures of struggling men were crowding the little space wherein we had entered from the chapel.

With a cry such as Serafino only could vent he was in the thick of the fight, his big body forcing a passage that permitted me to follow him, but this closing again, the press took us apart and I was being driven against the wall of the chapel, seeing like phantoms the faces of Massoni and Cesario, all blood-besmeared and altered by the fury of the battle. Now I was free from my assailants, and we were driving the Genoese toward the doorway that framed a ruddy square of fire, and the dawn was coming through the painted window over the altar. I saw these trivial things, and heard the groans of dying men with a strangeness of surprise which seemed to numb my senses and take away all feeling, yet never once did I pause in striking or evading a blow. To and fro, but always gaining toward the patch of red framed by the doorway, feeling the hot air stinging my throat, and keeping back my panting breath, wounding and wounded again and again, I went, knowing



that we Corsicans were coming closer and closer together, hearing Cesario's voice encouraging his men, and conscious of Serafino's bulk towering amid his foes like a giant.

How long that desperate fight in the chapel lasted I cannot say, but the sun was glistening on the blood pools and shining on gashed and bleeding faces as we came helter-skelter through the doorway. The hot breath of the burning convent fell upon me, and the smell of blood along with it, as I leaped out into the air, and saw streaming in the direction of Bastia the remnant of our beaten foe. The battle was over at last, and we had won the victory, but at too great a price. We had defeated our foes, but our losses were great, and all hope of capturing the town was at an end for the time being. It needed not that weary council of war which was held to decide that, for the sight of our fallen comrades told only too plainly our weakened force, and presently Cesario, pale and bloodstained, came to where Serafino with some others sat wearied and lax, indifferent to everything in all Corsica or the whole world at that moment.

The convent was smouldering sullenly behind the heap of dead bodies that sheltered us from the heat of the burning building, and sprawling full length on the trampled grass Serafino was speaking to me in a sleepy tone as Cesario came up.

"I have a mind to look at the fellow who cut me down the head," he said, "but I lack the power



to drag myself to the chapel door yonder. There is a great dread of that vault too in my mind, Camilla Negroni."

"There are worse things alive than dead," growled Massoni who had escaped with but a few scratches.

"As the notary of Corte," replied Serafino, and it was just then that Cesario joined us. It was plainly to be seen that he had had his fill of fighting, for the leather coat on his back was cut in a dozen places, and each cut showed an edging of blood.

"The notary of Corte," he cried. "It was he whom we might thank for being shot, unless the saints had sent us deliverance. The villain is in Bastia at this moment. We spoke to him."

"When he was in such a brave spirit that it needed your she-dragon to subdue him, Serafino," I added, and then the tale of our adventures was gone through, whilst Serafino languidly got a brand or two from the burning convent and made a fire, over which we warmed the contents of a stew pot, left by one of our dead comrades at our overnight camping place, and made a meal with what appetite our weariness permitted us.



## CHAPTER XXI.

### THE ENGLISH SHIPS.

THE news Cesario had gathered during that memorable visit to Bastia which he and I made, was very welcome to the leaders of the insurrection, for it was certain now that the Genoese would receive no support from the Germans; but for all that, the revolt was to prove a lengthened time of trouble and despair to the brave islanders. The conflict I have described was but one of many of the like sort which devastated districts and cost much bloodshed, and were it not that I am concerned more particularly in narrating the events which affected me personally, there are many circumstances connected with the insurrection that might be described. These, however, are matters of history, and I will pass over briefly the account of the time following the skirmish outside of Bastia, and come to the time when a wonderful and unlooked-for occurrence brought help and new hope to my countrymen, and to me a lifelong friend by whom my career was to be influenced hereafter. And to that wonderful event was added another



shortly afterwards, by which not only the fortunes of Corsica were affected, but also the fortunes of those whom I had come to regard with affection and friendship, which were improved in a way so miraculous as to be worthy the fullest description.

When daylight spread over the scene of the battle-field around the ruined convent of Sant Antonio it showed a gruesome sight, and the roll-call was unanswered by many a score of our gallant comrades whose blood had dyed the grass and mingled with that of their slain foes. We were a sadly diminished company, and the order was given for retiring from the position which we were ill prepared to defend. The Corsicans fell back in the direction of Corte, without pursuit by the Genoese, and although there were many who were for laying siege in regular form to Bastia, wiser counsels prevailed and the leaders of the revolt occupied themselves during the ensuing few weeks in drawing up the articles of a constitution that was to form the basis of a settled government. Signor Ortoni had returned from his mission to implore aid from the Spanish king, but the effort had been unsuccessful, for that ruler declined to take Corsica under his special protection; yet as he had refused help to Genoa also, the mission had not been altogether barren of good results to us.

But our enemies were employing their utmost resources to subdue the revolt, and General Rivarola, the Genoese, had reached the island, bringing all the



troops which he could raise with him. The garrisons of Ajaccio, Bastia, Calvi, and many other strongholds were increased, and these places formed as it were a barrier round us which rendered our bravery and suffering useless. Moreover, the whole island was blockaded, all intercourse being cut off between the inhabitants and the surrounding countries; ships which would have brought us the means of continuing the war were seized at sea and destroyed, and within a short time after the outbreak of the revolt Corsica was within sight of famine. The bravest hearts quailed at that, the patriotism which had incited the insurrection could not avail against hunger and destitution which day by day grew greater, whilst worst of all, our stores of ammunition were almost exhausted.

It was when these things were seen and their meaning realised that overtures of peace were offered to Genoa. Paoli, Costa, our general Don Luis Giafferi, Castineta and Cecealdi, with many other wise and heroic men, met in council at Corte, and a proposal by which an end to the revolt might be come to was sent to Genoa. The distress was almost at its greatest in the island when this was done, and the news which spread very quickly, that the terms of peace had been refused, brought a deeper shadow over the unhappy country than had laid upon it yet. Hope died out of the breast of the most sanguine of our leaders, and something very like despair filled ours. The sacrifices of life



and substance which the brave Corsicans had made were all to no end, and the vengeance of our triumphant oppressors a thing to be dreaded, more even than the famine which stared us in the face.

This then was the condition in which we in Corsica found ourselves after six months of revolt. Fighting had been done with, for only in those strongly fortified places I have mentioned were any Genoese to be found, they having withdrawn from the interior of the island, and to break through that chain which held us, to attack and seize the strong fortifications and drive the relentless Genoese out, were alike impossible, and a hopeless despair, as I have said, crushed us to inactivity and despondency.

The company in which I was enrolled, having Cesario Arrighi as its colonel, was waiting for orders at a little village called Macca, that is situated not far from the Gulf of Isola Rossa; and the wearisome time passed slowly away. Serafino and Massoni, cured of their wounds months ago and eating their hearts, as the saying is, in enforced idleness, were quartered with me in a little mud hut that had once belonged to a goatherd, long since dead, and I doubt whether three hungrier men than we had ever looked across the blue water of the gulf that was to be seen from the hole in our mud-built dwelling that served for a window.

Serafino lay stretched to his full length on the dusty earth, gazing up at the buzzing flies which hovered over his head, whilst Massoni sat looking



blankly at an empty cauldron in which the last full meal we had eaten had been cooked. And that was two days since. I was resting my arms on the broken sill of the opening, looking out on the gulf of Isola Rossa.

"Cesario said," began Serafino slowly, "that we were to have some provisions sent us from headquarters. Cast a look into the stew pot Massoni, the slothful, and see if a scraping of fat has been left by chance in it—that might keep life in me until those headquarters rations arrive."

"I do not believe in your headquarters rations," replied Massoni, bringing the stew pan towards him with his foot. "They are hungry there—they are hungry in all the country, and why should we be remembered here in Macca. No, Serafino *mio*, there is not enough fat left in the stew pan to tempt a rat into thieving."

"Why am I left alive then to be famished?" enquired Serafino. "Because look you, Massoni, at the present moment, I could eat—yet what good does it for me to say this. Go into the village and beg something for us."

Massoni gave a little laugh. "Begging was never a trade of mine, Serafino—nor yours. Remember you how gaily we fared together in the mountains? There was always the chance of a fat Genoese to be encountered."

"Aye, I recollect," growled Serafino, "and that I had a purse of goatskin in those days—I left that



when we were beset by the *shirri*. Heigh-ho! I have the most amazing hunger within me that ever an unfortunate man possessed yet. Get down to the village and steal some food, Camilla."

Serafino spoke recklessly, being more than half famished, for neither of us had tasted food that day. Massoni threw a few silver coins on the ground and turned to Serafino.

"I went yesterday," he said, "into the village, where by the providence of Sant Anselmini remained the house of a baker; and I had already the vision of an arm-long loaf in my eyes. You know the kind, Serafino?"

"Forbear to picture it, Massoni," answered he. "There is nothing worse than the mention of eating to a man beyond reach of food. What said the baker?"

"That the last handful of flour had been baked and that should not a further supply reach him from the miller of Questinado, the saints only knew what was to be done. Thereupon I proceeded to a seller of poultry—think of the things one may buy at such a shop, Serafino—plump ducks, and tender chickens, that stewed or roasted, boiled or fried over the embers of a fire, send up the most delicious——"

"Forbear, Massoni," cried Serafino again, bringing the worn heels of his boots down with a thud on the ground. "You will prove tougher than a ten years old drake, but I shall verily begin to pine for a slice from your lean sides if you arouse more pangs of hunger within me."



"And in the shop were nothing but hooks and shelves, except the weazened poulterer himself who beat on his own block with a pair of fowl skewers, as though it were a drum. The fellow laughed in my face when I spoke of provender, for said he, 'The whole village is on the verge of famine and likely to be, if better times are not before us.' So with that I came away, having those useless pieces of money in my pocket," and Massoni finished with a kick at the empty stew pan.

There was a little silence after this, for what could we talk about? Our case was no worse than that of the others who formed the regiment and were quartered in the village. We had eaten up everything within Macca and for a mile around it, and although provisions were promised us, they had not arrived. The famine was becoming a reality now, and our gaunt faces showed its effects.

The sun shed its burning heat over the parched land, making the waters of the gulf like a sea of fire; the dreary time went by slowly, with the flies droning a lullaby which angered Serafino to the point of madness.

"Anon I shall fall asleep," he exclaimed, settling a blanket pillow to his liking, "and that is worse than being awake, for I do naught but dream of feastings. Only yesterday I had a vision of sitting in the vine-shaded tavern at Corte, and with me was the notary who——"

"Who has to be discovered yet for all his hiding," growled Massoni.



“And said Signor Poli with a softness of speech that was not to be resisted, ‘Serafino, my friend,’ said he, there are goodly days in store for you yet—you are to be a great man and a powerful, so take this toothsome morsel of food’—here he held out to me the wing of a vulture on a fork big enough for the raking of a haymeadow. What do you make of a dream of that sort, Massoni?”

Massoni shrugged his shoulders without replying, and Serafino continued,

“With that, I began to sing to the notary, and then came the she-dragon, who bowed thrice at my feet with a shake of her snaky hair before she seized her master the notary by the shoulders, and went flying through the vine branches with the wretch, whose shrieks died away, and I awoke to find you snoring in the moonlight, Massoni, like to a man on the brink of death. Those dreams come of an empty stomach, and I dread the approach of sleep. How long did that brigand baker tell you the miller would be in coming from Questinado?”

“Three days at the earliest,” answered Massoni; “so rest you content till then, Serafino. Three days.”

“Ugh!” growled the other. “Why did I trouble to save my famishing body at Sant Antonio, where it might be resting peacefully otherwise. What is the hour, Camilla?”

“Three o’clock chimed a little while ago,” I answered, giving a glance out on the sunlit waters,



and then neither of us spoke for some time again, each satisfied with his own gloomy thoughts, I suppose. I was thinking of the time when I had seen Nasone in Ajaccio; of my cousin and his crimes against me; of Teodor and the quarrel he and I had had, and all the events which followed it—when suddenly there came drifting toward the land, under full sail (the wind was light as a breath), two ships, and there were colours at their mastheads such as I had never seen. The flags were white, barred crosswise with blue and red, and Massoni sprang to his feet at my excited call. Serafino lay still, telling me that the sight was nothing but the “Mirage.”

“Say that someone is bringing me a cask of wine and a cartful of food and I will rise to my feet, but not for the most enticing dream will I do so. Indeed, what with hunger and longing I doubt my own strength to reach the door of this palace even.” And with this Serafino began singing the most doleful melody ever heard in Corsica. We took no notice of him, however, for from the village that lay below the hut, a throng of people were hurrying down the shore, whilst from the two ships came boats laden to the water’s edge, rowing to land.

“They are English ships,” shouted Massoni. “Their flag is the English flag and, look Camilla—the vessels have dropped anchor. Get up, Serafino the unbeliever—see for yourself and then, if you



have strength to run, follow us to the shore, for by all the saints in the calendar, there are the wine casks and cart-loads of food come to us in reality."

We were out of the hut and down the hill before another minute had elapsed, Serafino thundering after us with the stride of a horse, and then we had mingled in an excited crowd, seeing Cesario and some others at the edge of the rippling water awaiting the arrival of the boats.

What were the wildest dreams or the wildest hopes, compared with what was passing before my eyes during the rest of the day. Boat load after boat load of provisions and stores of war were landed on shore, brought from those English ships that lay at anchor in the gulf, presents brought us from unknown and mysterious friends of Corsica. The captains of the ships, who came on land and talked in a tongue that sounded harshly to my ears, told nothing which would unravel the mystery, and the English sailors would take no compensation for their laborious work of disembarking the cargoes, although money was offered them freely. Through the heat of the glowing afternoon the work never ceased, and when night fell it was continued, until a great heap of food, wine, powder, shot, and arms was upon the shore, closely guarded by Sergeant Serafino and a company of ragged soldiers.

It was mid-night before the last of the boats returned to the ships, carrying the jovial Englishmen whose language we could not understand, nor they



ours. The village of Macca had been busier that day than ever it had been yet: filled with the merry laughter and voices of the strangers, and amongst these I had witnessed a fair-haired lad whose dress denoted him to be an officer. But in the tumult and excitement of the landing I lost sight of him, and there were too many other matters to engage my attention than to watch his movements.

None in Macca went to bed supperless that night, nor was there a soldier but had his powder flask replenished and his bullet pouch refilled. We were ready to march against foes twice our number, to fight and conquer too, though the enemy might be behind the walls of a fortress, and until dawn broke again the sounds of song and merriment never ceased. Nor did our heartfelt thanks to our unknown friends, for the name "Englishman"—we had learnt that word which was never to be forgotten nor unblessed in Corsica hereafter—roused such enthusiasm as no name of Saint or conqueror had ever evoked. Our benefactors' names, their condition and station were never known, but that their noble hearts had beaten responsive to the sufferings of Corsica and their generous hands brought help to us, will never fade from a Corsican's grateful memory.

The ships had gone an hour or more, the bosom of the gulf rose and fell with undisturbed quietude once more; mysteriously as they had appeared, so had vanished those stalwart, ruddy-faced seamen, whose only request had been a little wine with



which to drink to the success of the Corsican nation, and in our hut half way up the hill from the village, Serafino's voice was bellowing out a song of rejoicing. And we who listened, nearly stunned by the volume of noise, seated at a table dragged to the hut from Macca—for we had guests that night—were applauding him, when there came the sound of someone beating upon the hut door, and a voice that spoke as the Englishmen had spoken as they landed our stores on the beach of the gulf of Isola Rossa.



## CHAPTER XXII.

MARTIN CHICHELEY.

**M**ASSONI who was nearest the door opened it quickly, and then entered the hut the fair-haired lad whom I have before mentioned, and a hearty laugh burst from him as he gazed round upon us. Serafino stopped in his song and for a moment we were silent, as the merry-faced stranger came forward, leaning his hands on the rickety table, and saying something which none of us could comprehend. He was tall and broad-shouldered, dressed as a sailor, the lace on his hat and coat denoting that he was an officer; and there he stood, neither he nor we able to understand each other, until at last Serafino held out his big hand which the stranger shook, and then with a smile the newcomer turned to me.

Cesario had been watching the little scene from a corner of the hut, and coming forward said something in French, which language I knew, and our strange visitor answered him with a hesitating tongue, but yet in a way that enabled him to give an explanation for his coming.



"The Englishman has been left behind when the ships sailed," Cesario told us. "He had wandered inland and lost his way. When he returned to the shore at last it was to find himself alone."

The stranger, during Cesario's speech, burst into another laugh, nodding his head to me, as though quite understanding what was being said; and Serafino stretching across the table handed him a pan-kin brimming with wine, which the Englishman took, and standing up cried "Corsica" as he drank, and when he did this, there was a cheer raised which made the mud walls tremble. He was no longer a stranger to us, but a comrade from that moment, and a dozen hands were held out to him, and a dozen voices welcomed him. What a grip he gave mine I remember, strong and firm as only Serafino's big fingers could have given, and his blue eyes were dancing with delight as he seated himself beside me and we began to speak in what French we were capable of.

Yet it enabled us to comprehend each other, and I learned that the Englishman's name was Martin Chicheley, and that he was an officer in one of the ships which had brought us the gifts of provisions and ammunition from some unknown friends of my country. Further than this he would say nothing, except that it troubled him to think of what his companions would say of his disappearance, and that it puzzled him to discover how he was ever to rejoin them. But he was laughing again the next



instant, being one of the merriest-hearted fellows I had ever spoken to, and a welcome change from the despondency of my companions.

It was wonderful how quickly and easily we began to understand one another after this, and it was not long, counting by days, before Martin had learnt enough of our language to speak to me in it. And doing this I gathered some knowledge of his own, although I thought and think now, that the English tongue is the most difficult one to speak of any in the whole world. Let me say then at this point that the conversations which Martin and I held were disjointed and full of quaint errors of speech at first, but that very swiftly we were able to talk freely.

But greater pleasure than this was the great friendship which sprang up between us, a friendship that was to last and grow greater as the years went past, from the moment when, in the mud hut on the slopes of Macca, Martin Chicheley and I met for the first time. How his eyes laughed as he watched the merrymaking and listened to the babble of talk; how he clapped his hands when Serafino roared out his song, joining in the refrain of it, and with what a jovial manner he sang one of his English songs. It was all a strange confusion of sounds to us in the hut, however, yet the music of the song and the music of the voice that sang, made us listen with eager desire to hear more. How his clear notes rang out on the silent night, and Sera-



fino who sat as though a spell had been cast over him, sprang to his feet when it ended and grasped the stranger from that far-off land, that some in the hut had never heard the name of even, with his two great brawny hands, and vowed by every saint he could remember in his excitement, that never since the days of Apollo had a sweeter singer nor diviner song been heard. Martin and I have made merry since then, in recalling Serafino's words, for it was but a homely song after all, and old enough to have been sung by Martin's great-grandfather, yet as to the sweetness of the singer's voice, in that I agree with Serafino, for never yet sang one more sweetly than did this Englishman.

This then was the manner in which Martin Chicheley and I became friends and close companions, whilst it was not very long, as I have already said, before I knew his history and he mine. His father was an honourable gentleman, so Martin told me, and his home was far inland from the sea, but for all that, nothing pleased Martin more than when his father made a sailor of him.

"So to sea I went" (I am repeating his words as I remember them) "and with Captain MacDiarmid—that's a Scotch name, Camilla," he said, seeing me shrug my shoulders at the uncouth word, "and there is not a braver, stronger, nor more honourable race than the Scotch, search where you will—with Captain MacDiarmid I went two voyages. The third was to this Corsica of yours, and here I have



got into a harbour that I shall never find my way out of it seems to me, for how to get aboard ship again, to say nothing of reaching England, is impossible for me to discover."

"There may come a vessel presently," I answered, a sorrowful thought passing through me as I said this, "in which you may sail. There were trading ships that sailed from Bastia, whilst from Ajaccio there——"

"And how am I to gain Bastia or Ajaccio," interrupted he; "for I know them only by seeing their names on Captain MacDiarmid's map of the sea. I have no money—that sounds strange you'll say, when my father is one of the richest men in Staffordshire—but it's the truth. I left my purse in my locker aboard ship when I came ashore, and it is ill travelling without one. Nay, I'll have nothing to do with your Bastias and Ajaccios, but just stay with you, or march with you, and if there is more fighting to be done, fight these beggarly Genoese with you."

My heart leaped for joy when he said this, and it was not long before Cesario heard Martin's resolution. The order had come for us to quit Macca and join another body of Corsicans that were coming from Corte at the time, and before the day was out Martin Chicheley had put a cartridge belt over his laced coat and armed himself with one of the new guns that had been sent us by our unknown friends from England. Side by side we marched



down through the village and out into the mountainous country, with new life in our purpose, and what was even better than that, full stores of ammunition at our side, and goodly weapons in our hands.

The talk of peace was at an end, the despair brought by the refusal of Genoa to accept it, forgotten. It was their turn now to negotiate for peace, and ours to reject the proposal. For amid the rumours that were always in the air, was one that a great foreign power was to assist the Corsicans in gaining their liberty, and freedom from the yoke of the oppressor. More than this, we had the means of carrying on the conflict, and the will to do so. Every day brought recruits to the army of patriots, and each morning the final overthrow of our enemies came nearer.

Amongst those who joined us was a man from the village where we had bivouacked after a toilsome march, who matched Serafino for height and strength, but was of such a surly disposition that it was without much relish for his company that we saw him stretch his long body before the fire, where Martin, Massoni, and I, with some others, were resting. Martin made space for the rough fellow, saying something in his merry way that sent a laugh round, and our new comrade glanced up, scowling at him. Martin had turned his face to me at that moment and did not notice this, going on with his talk and laughter, until suddenly he moved round



to our new companion, whose long body prevented Martin from feeling the warmth of the fire.

"We like fair play in England," said Martin good-humouredly, "my friend, as much as we like fair fighting. The fire will never get through your big body and the air is chilly. Make a little room."

He said this as best he could in our language, but the ruffianly fellow paid not the slightest heed to it, except to spread himself wider before the blaze and growl a word or two under his breath.

"They teach manners too in my country," went on Martin, his face reddening a little, but he said nothing further and moved away from the group. I wondered at this, for the fellow who had behaved so rudely, gave a jeering laugh as with his blood-shot eyes he looked after Martin, and I could not help thinking that my friend had shown but little spirit. Anyone else, I thought, would have resented the insult. The matter passed off, however, without further words, and very soon the weary soldiers were lying, sleeping peacefully after our long march.

I understood that we should join the main body of insurgents next day. Serafino who marched beside the rank in which were Martin and myself, with two other men whose names I have forgotten, told me this, and that without doubt we should lay siege to one of the fortified places I have mentioned.

"And the Saints deliver it into our hands," he



continued, "for never yet wanted I new clothes and new boots more than at this moment."

He certainly was ragged enough for any beggar, but his condition was not worse than mine or the others'. We were all ragged, and for the most part shoeless, and what with fighting and marching our clothes were past the art of mending.

"I see myself already in a dress such as a Corsican sergeant should wear," went on Serafino, "and a hat that General Rivarola might use. I will have a feather—nay, why not two feathers in it, and they shall be the longest to be got, and held in by a buckle of silver. I imagine myself in it, Càmilla."

I was laughing at his description, when suddenly Martin gave a little cry and turned to the fellow who was marching in the rank behind us. It was the man who had joined the regiment last, and behaved so rudely at our camping place. He had trodden on Martin's heels, and when my companion remonstrated with him for so doing, the unmannerly fellow gave a sneering answer, threatening to repeat his clumsy insult, and calling Martin by an ugly name.

Martin made no answer, but the red came across his cheeks again, and his blue eyes shot out a glance. Yet he held his tongue, and those who had noticed the affair, joined in a laugh against him. This made me angry, and I found my hand touching the hilt of my stiletto, as I spoke to my companion.



"The fellow is set upon insulting you," I whispered. "He will do worse before long unless he is chastised."

Martin looked at me, and there was something in the glance which I could not understand.

"When I sailed with Captain MacDiarmid," he said very quietly, "I was taught discipline, and helped to maintain it aboard ship."

"But the insult!" I exclaimed. "One cannot submit to the fellow's insolence."

"And therefore," continued Martin, as though he had not heard my words, "seeing that we are soldiers on the march, discipline must be kept up."

"But what will you do?" I asked, feeling angry at his calmness under an insult. "He will behave worse to you after this."

• Martin's eyes twinkled and a smile was in them.

"I don't think that," he answered, "but you must have patience, Camilla. Wait until the order to halt comes."

I did not enquire as to what I was to wait for. The matter could have been easily settled. Say that Massoni had been in Martin's place, two minutes would have seen his stiletto in the ruffian's ribs and the insult repaid. "Alas," I thought, "this Englishman's cold blood has made a coward of him."

The laughter continued and I could distinguish many a jeering remark made by those who seemed to bear ill-will against Martin, but to all of it he seemed deaf. We marched along, neither he nor I



exchanging a word, and at last the order was given for us to halt for the midday meal. We had reached a broad spread of grass land, where in a few moments, fires had been kindled and the day's rations had been served out to us from the carts which accompanied the troop. Serafino, Martin and I were seated together a yard or two apart from the group amongst whom I saw the fellow sitting who had insulted my companion. He was talking loudly, casting his sneering looks at us, and I caught a word or two that set my blood boiling. Martin listened an instant and then got to his feet, and I watched him, grieved that he lacked the courage to chastise the ruffian. But I did not understand an Englishman in those days.

My companion said not a word, but I saw him remove the belt from his shoulder, and the sword from his side, placing them on the ground close to me; and then, unarmed, he went straight to the group which I have mentioned, and because I feared the danger he ran, I followed him. He took no notice of me, however, but with a calmness that a Corsican could never have assumed, addressed himself to the big man by whom he had been so rudely treated, who was in the act of lifting a cup to his lips.

"Put that down," said Martin quietly, although his words might have been heard twenty yards off, "I have something to say to you, my friend."

The man did as he was ordered, from the very



surprise of the command, and stared back at Martin, uttering a coarse oath.

"The Englishman," he growled. "He who was trampled upon. Say what you will then, and go."

"You must stand up to hear me," replied Martin; and then as the fellow refused to move, my companion seized him by the ear, and with a howl he got to his feet. Never yet had I seen such fury depicted on a human face as he showed, and there was a dead silence as Martin and he stood confronting each other, we who had gathered round watching them closely.

"I am going to chastise you," said Martin very quietly, "because I dislike to be trodden on for one reason, and because I dislike a great deal more to be laughed at."

The fellow stared harder than ever, not quite understanding I suppose, for Martin spoke awkwardly, but how the chastising was to be done puzzled me, for my companion had left his weapons behind and stood barehanded.

"You will fight with me then?" laughed the big ruffian, drawing a knife and beginning to creep round his opponent, bending his body for the spring.

Martin nodded his head. "But it must be in my way—in the way Englishmen fight," he answered. "I am a stranger amongst you, and your blood-thirsty knife-play is unknown to me. I will teach you a better one."

There was a murmur of approval, and one of the



bystanders seized the fellow's hand that held the knife whilst Martin threw his coat off. "Make a little room for us, friends," he said in his laughing way, and then both unarmed, he and his antagonist stood face to face, and with a gentle tap Martin touched the other on the cheek, and sprang nimbly backward, holding one arm across his breast and the other extended.

His opponent with a snort of rage flung out his great fists, each fit and strong enough to have felled a bull, but although he struck with all his power the blows were guarded off as easily as one might puff a feather aside. Martin never moved his feet, but by a turn of the arm, warded the assault as he cast a quick glance at me, and the on-lookers laughed.

This seemed to enrage his opponent wellnigh to madness, for with a cry of anger he sent out a volley of blows that were rained down on Martin's head, and straight at his throat, yet never one of them touched. With an ease and adroitness past belief Martin stood, content to guard himself; but suddenly his fist lashed out and catching his antagonist on the point of the chin, the big fellow went flying off his feet to come in a heap to the ground.

He was up again the next instant, but Martin had changed his method now. Moving forward a pace, holding his head well back, he met the onslaught of his antagonist with a blow that seemed



to pass straight between the long arms of his foe and into his eyes, there was a stream of blood from the fellow's nose, and then with his right hand Martin caught him again on the point of the chin, and I saw the jaw start aside and drop as if broken, whilst Martin had recovered his position, standing with his arms placed as I have already described, and there went up a cheer.

But with a roar the huge fellow had rushed forward, dealing blows right and left, and Martin drew back from them. Once I saw him stagger, but he had recovered his position, and it was when his opponent, gathering all his great strength for the attack, came towering on him as it looked to me, Martin stepped aside and evaded the charge, hit out at the giant's head, and there was a crash as when a smith smites on an anvil. Down on his knees, and from his knees to the ground went the big body, and Martin stood waiting for him to arise. This after a little delay he did, and I saw him snatch a dagger from the belt of one of the bystanders—there was raised a cry of warning, but Martin needed none. Quick as one might have thought it he had stooped, grasping his foe by thigh and foot, there was a sudden whirling in the air, and before I could realise it, Martin had thrown over his shoulder the heavy body of his murderous antagonist, and with the blood pouring from his mouth the fellow lay insensible.

Without heeding his victory, Martin walked through





A sudden whirling in the air and the fellow lay insensible.







the cheering crowd back to our resting place, and I was beside him. There were no thoughts now that my comrade lacked spirit of courage, only a wild admiration for his bravery and manliness. There had been no vainglorious speech, nor taunts, but in his quiet method—I cannot call it a gentle one—he had cleared away the stain of insult, and repaid the jeers of the tormentor and his companions. And here he was laughing and enjoying his meal as though nothing had happened, although his knuckles were bleeding.

“Better that way than your knifing fights,” he said, “which are too dangerous and deadly for my liking.”

“I never saw a quarrel settled in that fashion before,” I answered. “I should like to learn the way of it.”

“Then you must go home with me, Camilla,” he laughed. “For only in England do men fight like that. Why, there are those in my native village who would take half a dozen of these ruffianly fellows I see about me, and serve them as I served the one yonder. Say then, will you come to England with me if ever the chance offers itself of quitting Corsica?”

“Willingly,” I exclaimed; “I have nothing that should keep me here—yet I must recover my lost inheritance first.”

There was no time to speak further on that point just then, for the order to re-assemble rang



out, and we reformed company. Martin's late foe had recovered some of his senses by this time, and was standing with his jaw bound up, ready for marching. There was no more treading on heels, no more jests nor sneers were heard, but many a handshake was offered Martin before we stepped forward on the road to join our fellow soldiers, and enter again into conflict with our foes. And the thought came over me that no victory we might gain could ever be so glorious as Martin Chicheley's over his ruffianly tormentor.



## CHAPTER XXIII.

### LOST.

**I**T was the next day that we joined the main body of Corsicans, which were under the command of General Giafferi, and learnt that an attack upon Bastia by the combined forces of the insurgents was meditated. We were well-armed, and if we marched bare-headed and bare-footed, as indeed very many of us did, we had the less to hinder us in the fighting. So said Serafino, who was gaunt as a skeleton almost, with hard work and scanty food, the provisions being too carefully husbanded for anyone of us to get more than one meal a day, and that not the most satisfying.

We were in high spirits, however, tramping along dusty roads, and through deep valleys, seeing everywhere around us traces of the condition into which the war had brought the land, and the hardships that were suffered by the people. Fields lay untilled, for who knew who might gather the fruits of them; vineyards and olive groves were neglected and left solitary, cottagers' homes were without inhabitants, and turn which way one might, the picture was one of



desolation. We heard that in some parts of the island the inhabitants were starving, and that deeds of crime were constantly being perpetrated by banditti who, contrary to the usual custom of those who had fled outlawed to the wild fastnesses amid the mountains, had joined in bands to ravage whole districts. Ordinarily the life led by a man banned by the law, and with the sentence of death pronounced upon him, was a solitary one, and only rarely did he associate himself with more than one or two others in the like condition as his own, but now the opportunity for outrage and plunder had brought them together, and we heard tales of their cruel deeds, how they spared neither man nor woman who dared oppose them, and with these stories we heard others of wild revenge and ruthless murder. Massoni told me this—although how he gained the information I know not—whispering as we marched shoulder to shoulder, and he would cast a look at Serafino whilst he spoke, as though fearful that his old comrade of the "*Macchia*" might overhear him.

We were making a circuitous approach toward Bastia, and on the march more men had joined the little army, so that we presented a formidable array. We had but little artillery, however, our store of powder, like our provisions, being too small in amount for cannon fire to be long maintained. We needed every grain of it for our guns, and although the tumbrels and heavy cannon carriages, few as they were, made a brave show, we depended mostly upon our numbers to capture Bastia.



It was afternoon, and through the heat of the morning we had marched until coming to a well-wooded glen a longer halt had been made than was usually the case. Under the shade of the trees we lay, having eaten our dinner, which was a scantier one than the preceding day's, and a good deal of grumbling was the result.

"The Saints deliver Bastia into our hands speedily," said Serafino in a solemn way as he sat resting his head upon his hands, looking up into the leafy boughs, "or we shall be eating one another ere long. Here comes Cesario, looking as grave as that iron-faced commandant of the castle at Corte who told us so civilly that we were to be hanged."

As he spoke Cesario came threading his way through the little group of men, until he reached the spot where Martin Chicheley and I were seated, and bent down to me.

"I have some work for you, Camilla," he said so softly that I doubt if Martin heard what was said. "There is a message to be carried to General Castineta, who is bringing some troops from Ajaccio to join us. It is of the greatest importance that he should receive the message before twenty-four hours have gone by. General Giafferi has ordered me to choose whom I will to execute the errand, and there is no one I would trust sooner than you. It is an errand of difficulty, maybe of danger. Will you accept the duty?"

"If I may choose my companion," I replied, and



before Cesario could answer I had turned to Martin.

"I am asked to take a letter to General Castineta," I said. "Will you go with me, Martin?"

"If we can get back here in time to help in the taking of Bastia," he answered. "I mustn't miss that piece of fun."

"It will take three days, coming and going," said Cesario, "and you will return with the force under the command of General Castineta."

"Then say no more about it," laughed Martin. "When shall we start?"

"Within the hour," replied Cesario. "Come with me, Camilla, to Signor Giafferi, who will give you the letter and all needful instructions." And with this I left Martin and accompanied Cesario to where the commander of the expedition was sitting, surrounded by a group of officers. He eyed me keenly, speaking in a sharp, abrupt manner, and I answered him without wasting my words.

"You know the roads between here and Ajaccio?" he asked.

"Yes, Signor," I answered.

"You will deliver this letter to General Castineta? Within twenty-four hours?"

"I will do so, unless I am prevented by force."

"Good," he replied.

"And if I am unable to do so?" I asked.

"The letter will be useless—but as you value your honour and the cause for which we are fighting, see that the message passes to none but General Castineta. You understand me?"



"Quite well, Signor," I said.

I saw Cesario bend down and whisper a word or two to General Giafferi, whose stern manner relaxed whilst he listened, and a kindly smile came into his sunburnt face. Rising from his seat, he held out his hand which I took.

"I wish you success," he said, "and a safe return. I shall not forget the service you have done me," and I gave a bow as we shook hands. Then I went back to Martin, having beneath my ragged coat the letter which had been entrusted to me. In a few moments Cesario returned to us with some trifling directions as to the route we should take in order to strike the main road from Ajaccio by which the troops under General Castineta would advance, explaining that the attack upon that town had been postponed, in order to concentrate all the forces at command upon Bastia.

Cesario went a little way with us, warning me to keep a careful watch during my journey, and he did this so seriously that I understood that the difficulties and dangers he had hinted at would be very real ones, but I kept my thoughts to myself. I had a companion in whom I could trust if the hour of danger came, and we were well armed. Cesario left us at a point a short way up the steep path, from which we could look down at the place where the little army of ill-clad, hungry patriots had encamped, and I saw my comrades already stirring to resume the march. With a hasty word



or two of farewell Cesario went back to them, and I remember seeing his agile figure descending and hearing the words of command, for the troops to fall in, coming up to where Martin and I stood, little thinking at that moment, how long a time would elapse before we saw our old companions again, or of the strange adventures and dangers that we were to encounter. My thoughts were only upon the duty which we had undertaken and the need for us to hasten to perform it, so with a last glance at the retreating forms of the soldiers Martin and I turned our faces in the direction of the solemn mountains, and began our long tramp toward Ajaccio.

"How long is the walk of ours to be?" asked Martin, as we breasted an almost perpendicular rock, to find ourselves amid a silence that one can only meet with in the mountains, "and when shall we gain the main road, Camilla?"

"We ought to reach the foot of Monte Rotondo before nightfall," I answered, keeping a watchful glance for a landmark Cesario had described to me. "There is a ruined chapel somewhere hereabout, and we turn from that going downward."

"I am contented enough with being where I am," continued Martin. "We have no glorious places such as this in England, that seems like a bit out of fairy-land."

It was indeed a beautiful part to which we had come. The brown rocks were decked with flowers,



and the turf was smooth as velvet under our feet; a thicket of myrtles covered with white blossoms, amid which clematis hung in garlands, casting a welcome shade, whilst around us were rosemary and broom, and tall clumps of lilac-blossomed heath. Cork trees dotted the swelling earth here and there, together with prickly cactus, wild fig trees, and oleanders; and the scent of sweet-smelling herbs and flowers was in the soft air. The scene made one forget the savage conflicts which had devastated this beautiful island, and the suffering of its poverty-stricken inhabitants.

"Where does this ruined chapel stand?" asked Martin as we walked on again (we had stayed our feet a moment to gaze around, I remember), and were approaching another change in the track; "because it seems to me, Camilla, that a few signposts—such as we have in England—would be useful things. Suppose we lose our way?"

"I do not think that is very likely," I answered laughing. "This is not my first journey amongst the mountains. The road lies somewhere yonder," and I pointed my finger in the direction we were to take, our talk going back to the wrongs I had suffered at the hands of Fabiani Brasco, as it very often had done when Martin and I sat side by side at the camp fire.

"You ought to see Mr. Emanuel Matra," said Martin in his English way of speaking; "for depend upon it, if anyone is to help you, he is the man.



How should I speak to him? does he dislike his name of Nasone?"

"I doubt whether either you or I will have the chance to see Nasone for many a long day," was my answer. "We have too much to do, before that comes, and who knows whether or no I shall have any need to trouble myself or anyone else about land and money presently."

"That is true," replied Martin in his cool way. "We may get a bullet through our heads, you mean. I hope not, however, for I want to see my old house once more at any rate, and what is more, I want you to go there with me."

It was a subject we had often talked about, this going of mine with Martin Chicheley to England, if ever the opportunity came for so doing, and I had quite made up my mind to accept the invitation.

"I must have an understanding with my cousin first," I answered, "and it is for that reason I mean to get into Bastia. He and his son are there, along with the notary of Corte."

Martin had heard the story about Signor Poli and he burst into a laugh when I mentioned him now.

"Signor Poli!" he cried. "I shall be glad to see the meeting between him and Cesario and his friends. What will happen?"

"Massoni will shoot him as certainly as the sun is in the sky," I answered. "That is, if Serafino does not do so first. Revenge is a sweet thing, Martin."



"Forgiveness is a sweeter," he replied; and then he began whistling as if nothing more need be said about the notary.

The sun was sinking when we reached a point in our journey from which the ruined chapel which Cesario had described to me, ought to have been visible; but although we scanned in every direction, we were unable to discover it, and a feeling of dismay came into my mind that I might have lost the way to the landmark. The consciousness of the delay this mistake of mine might occasion in the delivery of the letter to General Castineta, troubled me greatly, and I resolved to push on through the rapidly approaching darkness in order to discover the road which led into Ajaccio. I said nothing of my fears, however, to my companion, and after a useless stoppage of some moments we stepped on again.

It was black night already in the woody depths below us, and the glistening summit of Monte Rotondo from which the snow cap never melts, had become hidden by a thick curtain of clouds that had gathered to add to the gloom which seemed to have suddenly changed the face of the landscape and blotted out the beauty of it. Whilst I paused for an instant a blast of furious wind came sweeping through the gorge to which we had come, a peal of thunder which roared and echoed seemed to shake the very mountains, and a flash of lightning so vivid that it lit up the scene around us as with fire, dazzled



our eyes, leaving a dense darkness upon them as the flash passed away.

It had shown us, however, that the descent into the gorge would be a perilous venture, for the rock-strewn ground was precipitous and black as pitch. Down it ran a hissing stream from the heights, and I knew that within a few minutes after the impending rainfall, the stream would be a raging torrent which would sweep us along in its descent, should we be caught by it. The wind was a hurricane now, before which we stooped and were almost driven backward, but gaining the shelter of a break in the mountain side we crouched down breathlessly.

"There will be no getting to Ajaccio," said Martin, as he shielded his eyes from another blinding flash, "unless the wind is good enough to carry us there, like a pair of witches."

"But the letter, Martin!" I exclaimed. "That must be given to General Castineta. We promised, remember."

"Ay, I know we promised," he replied; "but who was to guess that this storm was lurking for us. Listen!"

There was no mistaking the sound. I had often heard it as I had sat in the room in my cousin's house, and watched the gathering of a storm amongst the hills. It was the rain coming, with a hoarse moan, and the next moment in all the strength of its fury the water fell, spouting over the rocky lip beneath which we had sought shelter, and down



the mossy track we had passed, the stream growing each moment wider and deeper, foaming and roaring, churning itself white in the lightning glare and dashing madly down the gorge. It would have been certain death had we been in the path of the torrent, whilst even where we stood it was dangerous. The tempest howled and tore its way through the trees, and we could hear the crash of splintered branches and trunks, the lightning bringing everything around us into sight every few moments.

"There is a safer place than this," shouted Martin, amid a second's lull in the storm. "I saw an open path up above here. Let us reach that, Camilla."

I answered without being heard, for a clap of thunder deafened us at that moment, and then on our hands and knees, for to stand upright was impossible, we gained the spot to which Martin had pointed. Through the storm, now advancing a few paces, and anon shrinking backward from the fierce blasts, we reached a place of shelter at last, wet to the skin, panting with exertion, and so bewildered and confused that if the fate of Corsica had depended upon my doing so, I could not have told from what direction we had come, nor whither we were going.

Lost among the mountains, without a trace of any path, one moment in darkness and the next surrounded by a blinding light, we went on, groping our way helplessly, until Martin came headlong over a fallen tree, and when he had recovered his



feet we sat down, out of very weariness, two drenched, forlorn creatures, to consider the best thing to be done.

"If it had only been that ruined chapel of yours," said Martin, trying to laugh, "I shouldn't have minded breaking my shins over it. Where are we, Camilla?"

"I know no more than that we are in the island of Corsica," I answered, "but what particular part of it I cannot say. Not far distant from Monte Rotondo, however, for I saw its snow cap in the last flash of lightning."

"But it is plain that we cannot sit on the tree trunk all night," went on Martin. "Let us move on."

"Willingly," I replied, "but one can fall easily down a precipice, and I have General Castineta's letter to deliver, remember."

"To tell the truth I am too busy remembering ourselves just now," he retorted, "to think of him. Let us follow this descent."

I made no reply but got my soaking body upright again, and facing the wind and rain once more we went down the slippery grass slope, and it was just as a flash came to shew us an obstacle in the path, that Martin gave a shout of joy.

"The chapel," he cried, "I saw it distinctly, and we are not very far from it. Heave ahead, Camilla, brace your main sheet taut and follow me."

The fierceness of the tempest had passed by in



a great measure now, the thunder and lightning pealing and glaring further and further from us amongst the distant hills, and guided by Martin I hastened on, seeing presently through the darkness a light, throbbing in the shrill wind, then the blurred form of a cottage like a great blot before me, and we were hammering with our musket butts at a bolted door.

There was the growl of a dog and the sound of a harsh voice that demanded our business, but having no breath left in us to answer, Martin beat another tattoo on the closed door.



## CHAPTER XXIV.

### THE RED GAMBINI.

THE barking of the dog turned to a savage growl, the shrill voice of a woman joined the man's, and what with the howling wind and the plash of the heavy rain, Martin's demand for admittance became lost in the uproar, and I know not how the matter would have ended, if another voice had not unexpectedly come to our aid. It was a clear, sweet voice moreover, and stilled the others, as we heard it speaking to us through the bolted door.

"We are two travellers," I answered, "lost in the storm, and beg for shelter."

"Being wet to the skin and likely to fall over the nearest precipice if we move from your door!" shouted Martin, and at this we heard the bolt withdrawn. Then the door opened and I saw the grizzled heads of an old man and woman—which was the fiercer of the two it would have been hard to say—and the face of a dark-eyed girl about my own age, who stood holding the lamp between us and the old man and woman.



"You are alone?" she asked, giving a glance at Martin, and I saw the bright colour come into her cheeks as he made a bow. "There are two only?"

The old man had pushed me aside in his eagerness to bolt the door after our entrance, and I was hindered in giving my answer. Martin was ready enough, however, with his.

"We are quite alone M'selle," he said gaily, "and as you see us, nearly dead with the storm."

"Come hither then," exclaimed the old woman, who had not yet spoken, "you shall have what help we can give you; yet that is little enough, for the times are bad."

I looked round at the place, which was a large comfortable room, for all that the floor was earthen. A fire blazed in the hearth and there were tokens that the owner of the house was fairly prosperous. A bright red curtain hung before the window, a narrow parting in the curtain allowing the gleam of the lamp to be seen, by which we had been guided, and ranged on shelves were more plates and dishes than ever were in my cousin's house. Everything shone with the cleanness of it, and the old-fashioned furniture gave a substantial air to the place. A meal was ready prepared on the table, and as though on guard, a big dog stood beside this, its angry growling silenced by a word from the girl.

The man was about sixty years of age, whose stooping figure had once been a manly form of



great strength. His voice, less harsh than at first, had a firm ring, and when a shrewd examination of us was ended his manner became friendly. The woman, who was about his own time of life, was shrivelled in face and hands, yet without any sign of weakness in her gait and speech, and I would have noted the bearing and appearance of the girl, if, at that moment of the old man's speaking to us, she had not turned away, going to the hearth, whence came from a hanging cauldron the most delicious odour ever savoured.

A few words explained to the farmer, as we discovered him to be, the cause of our distressed condition. And the mention that we were from General Giafferi's army brought us a generous welcome in a moment.

"I am too old and bent to be of service as a soldier," cried Signor Vico (he had already told us his name); "yet what lies within my power to aid him, I will do gladly. Follow me and you shall have dry clothes, then a good meal, and I will listen whilst you recount the tale of my countrymen's brave deeds."

He led the way to a loft-like room, which we gained by a ladder from the kitchen, and it was not long before we were seated in dry clothing at the farmer's table.

"Haste thee, Lucia!" he cried. "One gets the hunger of a wolf who travels the mountains!" And the girl thus addressed lifted a steaming dish to the table, laughing merrily at our host, whom we



speedily discovered to be her grandfather. The old woman brought a flagon of wine, and very soon we were as merry as though we had known each other all our lives. Martin told his history and described his native land in a way that made Lucia listen intently, forgetful of her shyness; and then I saw how beautiful she was, and how deeply Martin's talk interested her. I think he must have observed this also, for once or twice he stopped speaking, and at these moments Lucia would turn to her grandfather, asking some useless question in a confused way.

"You are going to Ajaccio, you say?" asked Signor Vico. "That is a long way off and a thousand dangers lie in the road."

"It is of the greatest importance that we start early in the morning," I answered. "The storm is nearly over, and I am disposed to travel through the night, for every moment is precious."

"And lose our way again!" exclaimed Martin, "without the slightest chance of finding another shelter. Never think of such a rash thing, Camilla, for here we are safe in port, and I don't trip my anchor without having a fair course before me."

Lucia's smooth forehead puckered with a little frown of enquiry as Martin spoke, not comprehending him clearly, and I thought a fear of something troubled her. Perhaps he noticed this also, for the next moment he had begun a merry tale to which we listened eagerly, for who better than Martin knew



the manner of making a story interesting. Then, when Martin had finished Signor Vico told us of the state into which the country had fallen, an account very much the same as I had heard from Massoni.

"There is a band of cut-throats under a brigand who is called 'The Red Gambini' infesting the country," he said, "and never before has Corsica been so plagued as now. Somewhere amongst the mountains of *La Titime* 'The Red Gambini' and his companions skulk."

"Of what need is this talk, Tomaso!" cried the old woman his wife. "Better to speak of the bright days that are to come to us, and the happy ones for little Lucia yonder, who has scarce eaten the meal of a bird, with your foolish chatter of Gambini."

"Nay, Lucia has laughed the loudest of us, gentle Ursulo," replied her husband, "whilst as for eating, she has a better appetite than mine." And here he turned to me. "This journey to Ajaccio is important then?"

"Of the greatest importance," I replied, giving a glance at Martin, who was so engrossed in his talk with Lucia that he did not heed a word I said.

"Take counsel of me," exclaimed the old woman. "Rest here to-night, and travel by daylight. Tomaso will shew you the way, for without a guide I doubt if you would ever gain the road to Ajaccio. A black night such as this is better spent under shelter."



There was so much good reasoning in this and good sense, the welcome to remain was so hearty, that I resolved to abide by it; and so when supper was ended we drew round the fire, for although the day had been hot the exposed position of the house, and the storm that still howled around it, made the blaze acceptable.

Presently a solemn old clock groaned out the hour of ten, whereupon the farmer rose from his chair, yawning.

"You and your companion," he said, addressing Martin, who to tell truth had talked more to Lucia than to anyone else, "must sleep in this room, for I have no other to offer you. Yet by the fire, and with a blanket each, you will make shift to slumber sound enough."

"The sounder when one remembers the hillside that might have been our lodging," laughed Martin, "and if ever you should come to England, Signor Vico, my father and I will repay you for your kindness in giving us food and shelter."

"Tush!" exclaimed the farmer, his stern features softening into a smile. "There is little to thank me for, and the storm has nearly spent itself, although it has been fierce enough. Come, Lucia, get blankets from the clothes press and bring them hither, or it will be midnight before I am asleep."

Lucia got slowly from her chair and went up the ladder, bringing back in a few moments some covering for us, and then with a promise to be our



guide on the morrow Signor Vico climbed up to his room, Dame Ursulo and Lucia following him, and when they had disappeared Martin did what I had never known him to do before. He heaved a deep sigh.

"You are sorry that our journey has been delayed, Martin," I said, "and indeed I am troubled too in thinking of the wasted time."

"Of course I am very sorry," he exclaimed in the way one speaks who means the contrary to his words, "but I never yet found a port more to my liking than this one."

"A strange reason for sighing then," I laughed.

"Not so strange either when one thinks of the waste of time, Camilla," and it was Martin's turn to laugh. "But sigh or no sigh, I am glad enough to see a good night's rest before me." With which he rolled one of the blankets round him and stretched himself before the fire, with an ancient foot rest for a pillow. I piled some fresh logs round the hearth and had followed Martin's example in a few moments, whilst for all that our couch was hard-trodden earth my companion seemed already sleeping. I lay watching the crackling logs beside which the dog had curled himself, and listening to the moan of the dying tempest I thought of a thousand things until I suppose I too fell asleep.

I was in the midst of one of the strangest dreams ever dreamed when a low growl from the dog who had moved from the fire and was standing close to



my head, awoke me. I could see the glint of the animal's bloodshot eyes in the firelight, and marked his intent look, but there was a dead silence within and without the house. I spoke to the dog softly, not wishing to awaken my companion, but as if the dumb thing were impatient or indifferent, it crept past me, going stealthily in the direction of the barred and bolted door.

The flicker of the fire sent a dim sheen of light across the kitchen, but except for this the place was full of black shadows and gloom. Martin lay partly in the light, sleeping soundly, and save for the moan of the wind now and again, there was, as I said, perfect quietude. Raising myself on my elbows I watched the dog's movements as he stood with an uplifted paw, facing the closed door growling. And then amid the heavy silence I heard the soft scrape of footsteps outside the house.

"Martin," I whispered, crawling toward him and touching his shoulder.

He rolled over, opening his eyes and looking at me.

"What is amiss?" he asked drowsily. "You have carried me out of the garden of my old house—ay, I can think I am there still."

"Hark!" I answered. "There are footsteps on the path outside—the dog heard them before me."

"Some more lost travellers maybe," he replied, twisting over in his blanket and looking at the dog. "They'll be late for supper, Camilla."



"Listen!" I repeated. "The window fastening is being tried. Travellers say you—the Saints forbid that they are not——" and then I stopped, not caring to finish the sentence, for upon the ladder, closely wrapped in a cloak and holding a lighted lamp, was Lucia.

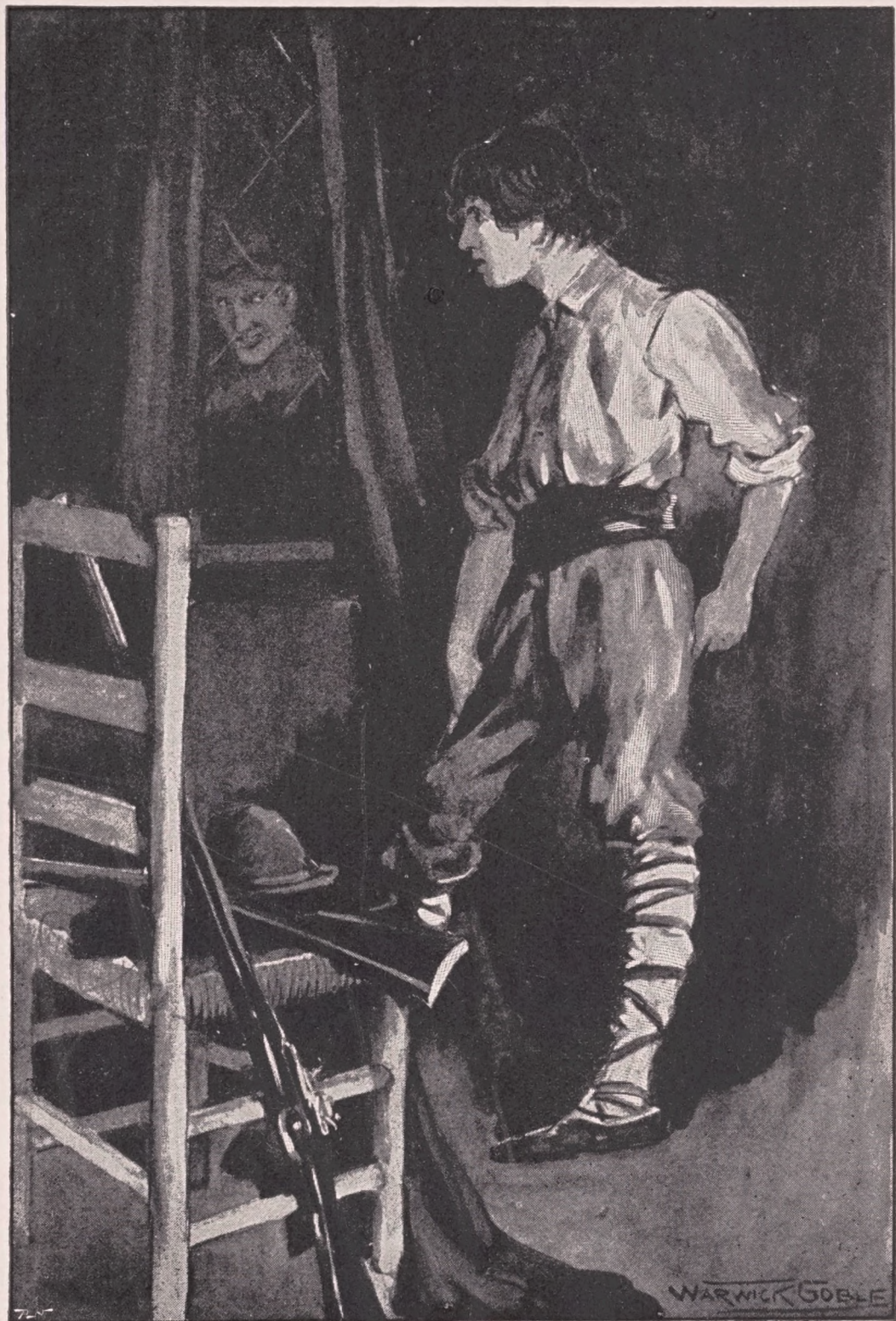
Martin sprang to his feet, advancing to the ladder softly, for Lucia's finger was upon her lip warningly, whilst I went with equal caution to the window, drawing aside the heavy curtain and peering out.

The sheen of the firelight was full on the diamond-ed casement, and as I looked through it, there came upon the blackness of the night the face of a man—nearer and nearer until it was pressing against the glass, and I could see every cruel line about the drawn-back lips, the ghastly look in the staring eyes, and the swift famishing glance (I have no other words in which to describe that awful gaze) which was set on the room. There was a crimson cap drawn down almost to the man's eyebrows, and in that one instant of my returning his look, I saw the cap was of rich silk.

But I had let fall the curtain and was beside Martin—Lucia remaining a little way above us—the next moment, and I cast a look up her resolute face. There was no fear there, yet she had drawn backward as though my hasty words had brought a horrible misgiving to her.

"There is a stranger without," I said, "and by the look of him not likely to be welcome here, Martin."





There came upon the blackness of the night the face of a man.

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"Quiet the dog," he answered hurriedly, for the animal was whining and growling as though half maddened. "Perhaps we need not arouse Signor Vico. He is an old man."

Lucia, however, had already passed over to where the dog stood, trembling with eager excitement, and at a word from her, he ceased growling, but moved close to the door, and Lucia came back to us.

"There has been talk of brigands," she said. "You heard my grandfather speak of them, this evening at supper time. Our house is a very lonely one, and we are thought to be rich. This face"—she turned to me, "of what sort was it? Nay, I will see for myself," and before Martin could prevent her she had lifted the curtain, holding the lamp high, so that its gleams made the casement bright. As she did this there rang out the report of a musket, and a bullet crashing through the casement, struck the upheld lamp, shattering it, and splintering itself against the opposite wall.

Martin uttered a cry and ran forward, lifting the girl from her position of deadly danger, yet for all that the bullet had been within a few inches of her head, she never lost self-possession.

"Back!" he exclaimed. "Go back to your room, Lucia. This is no place for you!"

There was a tone of entreaty in his voice, and she cast a swift smile in return, stooping to a place of safety in order to escape another shot, but none followed.



"I have seen," she answered calmly. "The Saints have been merciful in sending you and your friend here to aid us to-night."

"Whom have you seen?" cried Martin.

"The Red Gambini," she answered.



## CHAPTER XXV.

### THE ATTACK ON THE FARM.

LUCIA was the calmest of us, for the thought that, if indeed that horrible face I had seen at the window were the brigand's, my errand to General Castineta might be further hindered, was upon me, and I glanced anxiously at Martin who stood as though protecting the brave girl. And then with a hasty step Signor Vico came stumbling down the ladder, followed by Dame Ursulo who carried a light. He cast a swift look, first at us and then at the window, ordering the two women back to the room above.

"I will stay by you, Tomaso," replied the old woman angrily. "Let Lucia go to a place of safety." But her husband paid no heed to his wife's answer.

"Who fired that shot?" he asked, checking a hasty word.

"There are men standing on the path," I answered. "One of them has the face of an evil spirit. Lucia says it is 'The Red Gambini.'"

"The Saints forbid!" ejaculated the old man. "We are ill prepared to resist him and his murderous crew."



We had been standing, grouped by the foot of the ladder, everyone too surprised and excited to say many words. Not that they were required, the danger before us being too clearly understood; and as Signor Vico moved to where a great wooden shutter used for guarding the window in winter time, stood, another bullet came hissing past us, and Dame Ursulo shrieked.

"Help me with this," cried the farmer, attempting to lift the massive piece of woodwork, as I ran forward, taking one end of it, and we placed the shutter before the window, fixing it by means of holdfasts that were in the wall. Then we made sure of the door being secured, and although a shot blew the lock from its place, leaving a jagged rent in the stout door, the thick bars that crossed it were too sturdy to be easily broken.

"Open your door, Vico!" shouted a voice from outside, and there was the sound of the gathering of feet on the gravelly path. "I am not inclined to be patient with such as you."

An angry frown settled on the farmer's face, but he made no reply. Turning to me he asked how many bullets were in my pouch.

"Three dozen at the least," I answered, and then Martin was with us, holding his gun in his hand.

"Through that hole in the door you and I ought to hit two birds, Camilla," he said cheerily. "And as this fellow they call Gambini has begun the fight, we will take a share in it."



Our powder had got damp during the storm, but Signor Vico had plenty more, and when we had primed the pieces afresh, Martin and I went softly to where the great rent had been made in the door. Crossing the muzzles of our guns in it we fired together, and a yell of fury from our assailants was the result.

“Excellent!” cried Martin, springing to his feet (we had fired kneeling), “I warrant they have cleared from the doorway outside there!” And then Lucia had crossed to us and given him another loaded gun.

“It is only right to speed the parting guest,” he said. “That’s an English proverb, M’selle,” and before he had finished speaking Martin fired again through the hole. There was no cry, but I heard as though someone had gone stumbling, and then there was a momentary stillness, the powder smoke circling round Dame Ursulo, making her look strange and gruesome.

Not until this instant had I quite realised the startling rapidity with which everything had happened, nor the deadly peril we were in. The rush of Signor Vico from his room; the placing of the stout shutter before the window; the bursting of the door lock, and our firing through the jagged rent it had left, had all happened as it were in a moment. I looked round, seeing Martin standing beside Lucia; Dame Ursulo’s red face peering through the smoke wreaths, and Signor Vico busying himself at a



corner cupboard, taking from it arms and ammunition enough almost to have begun the siege of Bastia with. Then everything changed in a second, and we three men were standing before the door, watching it bend and hearing it creak as those without attempted to break it open. The woodwork was but a frail thing, yet it was the only barrier between us and death, for there would be scant mercy shown us if those bars and bolts parted.

We said very little; just a little ejaculation or two as we watched the yielding timbers of the door quail before the fierce attack on it by the brigands, and once or twice the thick bars seemed on the very point of being burst from their sockets; and if they did this, there would be a deadlier fight in that homely kitchen, than even I had taken part in yet. We fired several times through the lock hole, but I do not think with any result, and for some minutes there had been an ominous silence, broken only by the heavy blows on the door. Then with a loud report the topmost bar splintered from its socket, coming clattering to the ground, and the door bent open, allowing room for a dozen musket barrels to be thrust through. There was a volley which brought down the plaster ceiling in great pieces, and a yell of triumph from our foes.

"We must retreat from this!" cried Signor Vico, moving hastily to where Lucia and her grandmother were standing. "Who knows when the other bars may fall!"



The smoke was so dense that I could only see about me with difficulty, but I knew that Martin had reached Lucia and was speaking to her. Signor Vico was saying something to his wife angrily, for the old woman had refused to ascend the ladder I think ; and then it seemed as if we had all gone up at once, for I found myself in the loft-like room and knew that Signor Vico had dropped the heavy trap which covered the ladder, and that we were for a time safe from danger.

The room had a small window which projected a foot or further from the wall, and in the little recess thus made Signor Vico, Martin, and I took our places. The door of the house could be plainly seen from this point, and the moonbeams breaking now and again through the flying masses of cloud, showed us a band of men who were attempting to break into the dwelling; and when now and then a face came upturned, it seemed the face of a demon, ghastly and threatening. But we had no time to watch their movements, only time enough to take aim into the thick of the group, and as we fired, it scattered, leaving two of the enemy doubled up and still on the path. There was a little pause in the attack after this and one of the brigands—it was he who wore the bright scarlet cap, for I saw it clearly marked out in the moon-light—came toward us. Signor Vico watched him and then levelled his gun, but as though the fellow bore a charmed life, the bullet sped by him harmlessly.



"Signor Tomaso Vico," he cried in a high voice, "I am willing to spare your life, if you admit me and my men."

Martin was on the point of firing when the fellow spoke, but Signor Vico struck up the piece.

"A moment," he whispered. "Let me hear what the villain has to ask of me."

"And say that I admit you," he continued, raising his voice. "How then, Signor Gambini?"

"You seem to know my name," laughed the other, "like the other good people in these parts. You will do well to obey me, farmer."

Martin had fired, and I saw the red cap go flying from Gambini's head, and heard him give a hoarse laugh. He was out of gun shot nimbly enough, however, and then ordered a volley to be fired at our window, which was riddled the next moment, the glass flying in showers. Then as I crept back to it after the volley had been sent into us, I saw that the band of brigands were collecting heaps of underwood, with which some of them ran, placing it against the door, and that another of the miscreants had lighted a torch, ready to set the heap blazing. He was stooping to do this, his body black against the glare of the torch when I fired, and headlong into the heap went the man, his torch being extinguished at the same instant.

"Bravo!" roared Martin who was at my shoulder. "A good shot, Camilla, here comes another." And I saw one of the band run forward, and fling the



wounded man from the heap. There was another blaze of a torch, and this time Martin had sent it whirling, striking the man who held it on the arm, I think.

The bullets were flying over us as we did this, but we lay stretched along so that the missiles did no harm, and for a few moments there was no other attempt to fire the heap; but at last the Gambini succeeded in doing so, hiding himself at the further end of it, and although we sent shot after shot at him, Lucia and Signor Vico loading our guns quickly, we could not hit him. There was a thin wisp of smoke and flame, the crackling of wood, and then we saw a great, ruddy blaze spring up, high as the lintel of the door, and a shout of triumph rang out.

We could do nothing more in our defence by remaining at the window, and therefore descended to the kitchen to see the smoke and flame coming through the opening in the doorway and licking hungrily at the woodwork surrounding it.

There was a little quantity of water remaining in a tub in the kitchen and with this we made fruitless efforts to extinguish the flames that threatened to be speedily a roaring furnace. Through the thick smoke we ran, dashing the water where the fire had gained its strongest hold, but alas, although we did this again and again, it was plain that our doom was sealed. And it was just as I had dashed my last pannikin of water, that a bullet fired through the gaping door, struck me in the leg, and with a cry of pain I fell.



Martin was beside me in a moment, and lifting me in his strong arms, carried me to where Dame Ursulo, grim and fierce, leant against the table, watching the destruction of her house. Lucia was with her grandfather, and neither of them had noticed me fall I think.

"Are you much hurt?" cried Martin, his blackened face and anxious eyes close to mine.

"Leave him to me," answered Dame Ursulo, beginning to unloosen the thick boot which pressed like lead on my wounded leg. "Yes—you have been struck above the ankle—nothing but what a few days will mend—but what matters—what matters."

"Time enough," I answered faintly. "The house will be blazing shortly," and then I can remember nothing more very distinctly, for Dame Ursulo who may have meant to be kind, but was the roughest nurse ever heard of, had begun at my wounded leg that was burning as though a fire brand rested on it. I remember seeing Martin and Lucia standing side by side, and that he was speaking to her, and how big and blurred the figure of Signor Vico seemed, far off from me in the smoke. I saw the tongues of fire licking at every piece of wood within reach, and then a strange kind of wonder stole over me as to how soon it would be before we were in the midst of those hungry flames, feeling quite indifferent to my fate, and then amid the crackling of burning timbers and the shouts of those



who were compassing our destruction, came the sudden discharge of musketry outside, the shouts of triumph changed in a moment to cries of alarm and warning, and I can remember no more.



## CHAPTER XXVI.

### WE START FOR AJACCIO.

**I** WAS lying on a bedstead and at my side sat Martin. The sunlight streamed in through a broken window, and there was the smell of charred wood in the low-roofed room where I found myself. It was very still, and as a sharp twinge seized my leg I came back to my senses very quickly.

"How did it all end, Martin?" I exclaimed. "This is farmer Vico's house, is it not? Yes, this is the room up the ladder, and that is the window from which we shot down at the brigands. Where is the Red Gambini?"

"That amiable gentleman has disappeared," replied Martin, "and taken what remained of his band with him. You were hit, just before help came to us—don't you recollect?"

"But I cannot have slept through what followed the shooting I heard?" I answered. "What hour is it?"

"It is about ten o'clock," he replied, "and you have slept ever since Madame Vico who is down in



the kitchen at this moment, gave you a draught. She and I managed to bind your wound up—luckily for you it's not a very bad one—no bones broken."

"Then let us be getting on to Ajaccio," I cried, trying to raise myself, but falling back as I did this.

"You might as well talk of getting on to Staffordshire," said Martin. "You couldn't walk three yards, Camilla. Therefore, as this letter has to be given to General Castineta I am going to carry it."

"Tell me first how we were rescued," I answered. "The kitchen was almost blazing when I fell."

"Then it must be a short story," he replied, "although one of the best ever told. For a company on the march to join General Giafferi, noticing the light of the Red Gambini's fire I suppose, came towards it. The brigands were surprised, and although they fought bravely, were very soon put to flight. Meanwhile the house was getting well on the road to destruction, but by the help of many hands the fire was extinguished. There's a dreadful condition of things below, and for all that Madame Vico is glad to have her life safe, her anger against the brigands is beyond description. She has railed at Lucia until I was obliged to interfere, and then Madame's wrath seemed to fix itself on me."

"I should like to hear all that has happened," I said, after a little pause. "The fight was outside the house, Martin?"



"Not one of Gambini's band set so much as a foot within," he answered. "And Lucia——"

"Yes, what of Lucia?" I asked, for he had stopped abruptly, turning to crimson.

"Only that Lucia behaved like a heroine," he answered. "It was she who did most in extinguishing the flames, and of course to hear Madame——"

"I wish you would not stop in your story," I exclaimed. "What of Signor Vico?"

"Signor Vico is at this moment waiting to go with me part of the way to Ajaccio," replied Martin quickly, "and if this letter is ever to reach General Castineta I must start at once. I will return as speedily as possible."

He left me with this, and I lay thinking over what had happened, picturing the attack on the brigands and the fierceness of the fight that had followed. I was doing this, groaning sometimes with the smart of my wound, and partly because of my being forced to lie idle whilst stirring events were in progress, when Lucia came into the room, bringing me some food and wine.

"Your friend has gone," she began, and it was easy to understand her sorrow at the destruction which the visit of the brigands had caused, because Lucia spoke very mournfully. "The letter was very important you said?"

"It was of the greatest importance," I replied, "and now tell me of the fight between Gambini's band and the others."



Lucia shrugged her shoulders. "I heard the firing and shouting," she said, "but there was too much to do; the fire was spreading so quickly that I could think of nothing else than helping to put it out. It was Martin——"

"Yes!" I cried. "What of Martin? You and he are alike, Lucia, for you both stop in your talk. What happened to him?"

"He fought very bravely," she answered, "and when help came, was in the midst of the tumult so soon as he could open the door. I heard his voice highest of all."

Perhaps Lucia would have said more, but at this instant Dame Ursulo's screaming summons came up to the room where I lay, and Lucia returned to the kitchen. And slowly the day went by; Signor Vico not returning home until late that afternoon, nor was it till then that I heard the full story of our rescue. It was only just in time too that help came, for the door would have been burst open very soon, but beyond the broken windows and charring of the woodwork not much harm had been done to the house. Nor had anyone been hurt beside myself, and I will say here that the wound kept me prisoner a full week. A week too, when the hand and heart of every true Corsican were required in the good cause, and at a time of Corsica's greatest need I was prevented from moving from the farm house.

It was late next day before Martin returned to us, faint and hungry with his journey, yet



withal in better spirits than I had ever known him to be. But the news he brought, although he tried to make the best of it, was the worst we had heard since the outbreak of the revolution. General Castineta had passed northward to join General Giafferi, and it was impossible for Martin to deliver the letter. This he had tried to do, however, following General Castineta's march until meeting some stragglers from the army, Martin learnt the evil news which he had brought back to me. It was nothing less than the account of how General Giafferi's army had been surprised into a battle with the Genoese, and defeated so signally that the leaders of the insurrection had lost heart wellnigh. For not only had General Giafferi's army suffered defeat, but in other parts of the island the Genoese had gained various advantages, and the brief hopes aroused by the generosity of our English friends had been replaced by a dull, helpless despair again. The gifts we had received had been used long ago, hunger was rife once more, and although the Genoese had not yet ventured upon further offensive action against the Corsicans, we were in no condition to continue a war against them. These last facts we heard later on from two ragged, hungry soldiers who had begged for shelter at the farm, and their stories added to those already known, made it only too evident that unless assistance came to the Corsicans very speedily, our condition was likely to be worse than it had ever been.



By the end of a week I was able to get lamely down the ladder, and although much of the damage done to the house had been made good, sufficient was left to show the fierceness of the attack. The riddled window, the great black patches of burnt woodwork, the discoloured ceiling and ill-mended door were enough to show what our danger had been. Signor Vico helped me outside to a bench, where sitting down together he told me the full story of our rescue.

"He is brave, the Englishman who is your comrade," said he, "and has given Gambini something to remember him by. It was a combat between them, for Gambini was running away when his band had been defeated, and seeing the brigand's intention Signor Martin pursued him to the point yonder," and Signor Vico held out his hand in the direction of a little hillock a dozen yards from the house.

"It was hand to hand then," he continued, his eyes lighting up with the recollection brought by the story. "Sword to sword, and once your friend slipped on the wet grass, the blaze of the fire showed his danger and another moment and the Gambini would have run him through, had not a shot fired from the house disabled his swordarm, and then your friend had regained his footing. It was that shot which preserved Signor Martin's life."

"Who fired it?" I asked, and I saw a curious look spread over the farmer's face.



"Who indeed but Lucia," he answered. "She can hit a bird flying, and the Gambini was full in the light of my blazing house. Signor Martin cut him across the face, and the fellow disappeared, having full half of his band either dead or wounded."

He was silent after this for a few moments, as if pondering over some weighty matter.

"And now that your mission to General Castineta has been finished," he asked, "what will you and your friend do? You have spoken of rejoining your regiment?"

"So soon as I can walk," I answered.

"You have heard of the disasters that have befallen our army?" he continued, "but perhaps you may not know that it has been disbanded, for without provisions it was impossible to keep the men together. There is no regiment for you to return to. I heard this from a good source, and also that Signor Paoli and the other leaders have held a council that may lead to every Corsican laying down his arms."

As he spoke thus Martin came out of the house and joined us. There was a merry look on his face, that formed a striking contrast to Signor Vico's long visage.

"We are speaking of what is best for us to do, Martin," I said. "There is nothing to be gained by going to Corte."

"But a great deal may be done by going to Ajaccio," he responded, "and it is to do that which has been in my mind this week past. At first I



thought of getting a berth aboard some ship, but I begin to think that impossible. Yet I intend going to Ajaccio."

"It will be a dangerous task," said the farmer. "Even if you are not arrested immediately by the authorities, there will be always the risk of being denounced as a rebel."

"One must run into danger sometimes," laughed Martin, "and you yourself are about to leave your house to live near to Ajaccio."

"Lucia has been chattering I see," replied Signor Vico. "Yes, that is quite true. I dare not stay in this lonely spot with only Lucia and my wife. They will be safer if near a town, and I am rich enough to live without further work. We leave the farm in a few weeks."

The mention of Ajaccio brought back to me the memory of the wrongs I had suffered at my cousin's hands, and the prospect of again seeing Nasone and learning some further information regarding my affairs, made me agree with Martin's proposal eagerly. Maybe Nasone would be willing to help us with some money, for neither Martin nor I had a *soldo* between us; and at any rate I was assured that he would give us food and lodging until we were able to earn the means of living. From Ajaccio, too, Martin might be able to send a letter to England, and a dozen wild hopes crowded into my mind, making me forget the danger of venturing into the town for a moment, and the ill success of my fellow-countrymen.



"Let me but get the full use of my leg again," I exclaimed, "and we will start at once, Martin."

"There is no particular need for hurrying," he answered, "unless Signor Vico is tired of our company."

"Nay, that I shall never be," replied the farmer, "and you are welcome to stay here until Camilla is quite recovered. I shall not remove for a month perhaps."

So it was settled thus, that as soon as my wound was healed Martin and I should make the endeavour to gain entrance to Ajaccio, and this would be the less difficult to succeed in, seeing that the Corsican force which had been investing the town had been withdrawn to Corte. Only Calvi and Bastia were still being besieged, and that in a hopeless, cold-hearted fashion by a few of the troops of insurgents yet under arms, the inhabitants in other parts of the island sinking into a state of suffering and poverty, which were daily becoming worse. All our means had been exhausted, and the expectation of foreign aid, so long hoped for, and freely spoken about, had gradually died away.

It occurred to me as a strange thing that Martin spoke but rarely of his intention of escaping to England. At the beginning of our acquaintance this had been the one topic ever on his tongue, and how I was to accompany him, but since the night of our adventure with the "Red Gambini" and his band of brigands, scarcely a word had Martin spoken of his leaving the island. When I referred



to his doing so, and suggested means by which it could be done, he would turn the conversation aside lightly, and although we might possibly get a ship at Ajaccio, something told me that this was not the reason for his going there.

It was a week later before I was able to walk again without pain, and then the day came for bidding Signor Vico and his wife good-bye. Lucia went with Martin and myself for a little part of the way, and when she left us to return home, all Martin's gaiety and talkativeness seemed to go back with her. For he spoke not a word until we were a good two miles on our journey, and then he broke out into a wild kind of speech, to which I gave little attention, having my own thoughts to occupy me. I was thinking of what might be lying before me; and yet, although I conjured up a thousand strange surmises, neither of them were half so strange as the events that happened after our leaving the farm, which I will now proceed to describe.



## CHAPTER XXVII.

### THE TAX-GATHERER.

THE scene became familiar to me very shortly after Lucia's leaving us, and upon descending to where the road to Ajaccio could be seen winding in and out amongst the trees below, a well-known object caught my sight. It was my old home, Fabiani Brasco's solitary house, perched high in the mountains, a mile off from us, with its sombre surrounding of cypress trees and neglected olive grounds. Gaunt and grey it stood, no sign of life being visible, and the thought came to me that it was deserted, as I pointed it out to Martin.

"Yonder is Fabiani's house," I said, rousing my companion at last from his day-dreams. "Where I lived long ago. At least it seems long ago since I left it."

"Is your cousin there?" he answered, looking keenly at the old house. "What a dull place to pass one's life in!"

"Fabiani and Teodor are still in Bastia, I am disposed to think, and our old servant Paulina would hardly remain in the house alone. Yes, it is



deserted, Martin, and likely to be I should say. I for one will never go back to live in it."

"I shall remember that house," went on Martin. "It has such a desolate, haunted look. A place where one might be murdered and buried, so that nobody would ever guess what had become of you. But it is off our road, Camilla; we turn here to gain the way to Ajaccio."

A clump of trees hid the house from our sight and we found ourselves going deeper and deeper through a vineyard that had once been carefully tended, but was now wild and neglected. There were many such tokens of the condition into which the land had fallen, and we were glad when the road was come to which would lead us direct to Ajaccio. It was the one I had traversed with Gaspero and his two companions not very long ago, and Martin and I had joined it from a part quite unknown to me.

"We must have wandered a long distance from our proper road during the storm," I said, as we went along through the dust and silence. "What a fortunate thing we found Signor Vico's house!"

"It was the luckiest thing that ever happened to me at any rate," replied Martin, "and a lucky thing that I got left behind from the ship."

"That reminds me," I answered, "that you will be able to get on board another one at Ajaccio. Nasone will do all that he can to help you, and there may be a trader going to Italy perhaps."



"It can go where it chooses for all I care," replied Martin. "I am not going to leave Corsica yet, so talk no more about that, Camilla. There is too much for me to do here, to think of leaving. It will be more to the purpose if we decide how we are to get into Ajaccio. There is nothing more to be done that I can see, but to trust to the chance of being allowed to pass through the gate there."

"We shall be stopped and questioned without doubt," I answered, "and likely enough taken before the commandant."

"Then trust me to give a good account of ourselves," laughed Martin, "and as it is never any use to meet trouble half way, let us talk about something more pleasant than arrests and questionings."

With this Martin began telling me one of his merriest stories about his sea-going life with the Scotch Captain, and presently we reached the cottage where Gaspero had saved the woman from the clutches of the Genoese tax-gatherer. We stopped here to buy a cup of milk—Signor Vico had lent us a small sum a-piece—but the cottager would take nothing from us, when his wife recognised me as one of those by whom she had been rescued from Signor Rota.

"And if ever the time comes for me to repay that good service," exclaimed her husband, "you may reckon on me. You are going into Ajaccio, you say?"



"If we can get into the town," replied Martin.

"You can do that easily enough," was the man's answer, "but beware of Signor Rota, who will recognise your companion, as my wife has done. The tax-gatherer has a good memory of faces, they say. It happens that I have to go to Ajaccio this afternoon with my milk barrels, and so, as I said before, it will be easy for you to pass the sentries. I am known to them and my business is known too, therefore you and your friend shall be my servants for the time, and with a yoke over your shoulder pass as simple milkmen."

The ease and safety of the plan left no doubt of its success, and very soon Martin and I were helping the cottager to push a heavy barrow, on which were a barrel of milk and a pair of yokes. At a short distance from Ajaccio we placed these latter on our shoulders, hanging some clinking tins to the yoke ropes, and with the cottager driving between us, we went past the sentries at the entrance gate of the town, Martin giving a yell, such as never a milkman uttered yet, and even stopping to ask one of the scowling soldiers to buy a measure of milk. Then over the rough stones we went, clanking the cans, until coming to a quiet by-street we bade our friendly guide good-bye, and divesting ourselves of the yokes that galled my shoulders painfully, Martin and I made our way to the house of Emanuel Matra.

"I shall address him thus," said Martin, "or he may take offence at being called Nasone."



"It is the name by which he is known to everyone in Ajaccio," I answered, "and here we are at his house, Martin. The Saints forbid that he is not at home."

Hitherto I had visited Nasone by night, and it was somewhat of a surprise to see him in his silversmith's shop, busy at work at a little bench behind the barred window. It was so gloomy an interior, and the dust on the glass lay so thick that he was obliged to use the light of a lamp to work by, and with a long tasselled night-cap drawn down, nearly covering his ears, Nasone made a grotesque figure, as unconscious of our watching him, he worked away at a piece of old-fashioned silver plate. We looked at him for a few moments and then I rang the hanging bell, whereupon Nasone came hastily to answer the summons, giving a husky cry of pleasure at seeing me, and a few words were sufficient for him to understand the reason for my bringing Martin with me.

"Come in—come in!" exclaimed the silversmith; "although for what reason you have ventured to this lion's den of a town I know not. There is a most watchful guard kept upon even those of us who are well known, and it is short work always with a stranger. However, you have got to my house safely, and here you will be secure from discovery."

We were in a room adjoining the shop now, that overlooked a grass grown patch of ground behind



the house, and here, when Nasone had brought us some food, he heard our story.

"There have been rumours of the defeats the Corsican army has met with," said he when I had exhausted my news, "and from the time you left me, not a word have I heard of Cesario. Likely enough he is dead, and if indeed that is the case he is more fortunate than many of his countrymen, for our taxes have been increased, our oppressors are more insolent, and our lives less worth living than ever they were yet."

"Have you heard anything of my cousin?" I asked, "or Teodor?"

"Of neither—except this: they have proved themselves traitors to their country, and that an office has been found for Teodor in Bastia," replied Nasone. "I will wager the silver plate which I am finishing for the governor of Ajaccio at this moment, that Signor Poli is with Fabiani Brasco. And talking of the same governor reminds me that his plate—Holy Saint Argentini grant I may be paid for it, though I have my doubts—his plate, I say, has to be taken home this evening. Rota the tax-gatherer who goes with messages and runs errands like a lackey for this Genoese governor of Ajaccio, was here this morning with his vile abuse of me for my negligence, as the rascal called it, in not having the work done, and will be here again with more of his insulting epithets, or I am ready to give him the plate finished."



"Signor Rota!" I repeated. "He is the last man for us to meet with here. He will recognise me," and with this I told Nasone the story of Gaspero and the tax-gatherer.

"He is a grasping, cowardly wretch!" cried Nasone, "with whom I would have no dealings if I could help myself. But he comes from the governor, and although Rota's ways and words are enough to provoke the pope himself, I have to put up with them. It is "Nasone this" and "Nasone that," although such is not my true name, and not to be used by a fellow like this tax-gathering pettifogger; still I must submit."

"I should very much like to see this Signor Rota," exclaimed Martin.

"It would bring us into the peril of our lives if he saw me," I answered.

"Nay, but you shall see him," said Nasone excitedly, "and therefore when he knocks at the door presently, which he will do as though he were nothing less than the governor himself, instead of his servant, you and Camilla shall go to the room above. There by the window you can peep down into the shop, and whilst you are safe from being discovered you can hear and see everything that passes below. And now I must get back to work, for this plate has to be ready before long, or Rota will rave at me as if I were no better than one of the slaves toiling at an oar, out yonder," and giving a flourish of his long arm in the direction of the



harbour, where were the slave galleys, Nasone returned to his shop.

Martin and I remained in the room into which we had first entered, until we were aroused by a thundering knock at the house door.

"Signor Rota," cried Martin, getting up with a laugh, and then waiting until Nasone had taken his visitor into the shop, we crept softly upstairs to the place the silversmith had directed us to, it being a little, low-ceilinged loft, separated from the shop by a flooring of thin wood, the tall window lighting both that and the loft.

Signor Rota was speaking in a loud, commanding tone, as Martin and I knelt, with our noses close to the floor, listening, and I could see and hear the fiery-faced tax-gatherer hectoring Nasone finely.

"You are an hour late in finishing your work," he stormed, "and His Excellency is not to be kept waiting. Do you hear that?"

"Bawl a little louder and they will hear you at Genoa," answered Nasone. "Do you think me to be deaf?"

"I think you to be insolent!" cried Signor Rota, "and that to me, is being insolent to His Excellency through me. I shall not fail to repeat your words to him."

"Then I advise you to do so in a softer tone than your present one," retorted Nasone, "or may be your master will flog you for brawling in his house."



"Worse and worse!" screamed the other, and I could feel the board under me shaking with Martin's laughter. "I would have you understand that I own no one my master. His Excellency is my very good friend and I am here to oblige him. Give me the plate as it is, for I cannot wait any longer for it."

The words were scarcely out of his mouth, when I felt the board bending on which I knelt, there was a sudden crack, a wild grasping of my hands to save myself, and then down through the flooring went Martin first, full on to the head of Signor Rota, and as they rolled over together in a cloud of dust I came down on them. I recollect seeing Nasone staring at me as I fell, but what followed, that I cannot say. I only know that I was scrambling upstairs the next instant, hearing the tax-gatherer shout after me in a way that shewed that I had been recognised. Then Martin was at my side, laughing so that he could not utter a word of sense, and after him came Nasone, his long face dust-covered, and he too was so full of laughter as not to be able to speak.

"Signor Rota has gone without His Excellency's plate after all," cried Martin when he had had his laugh out, "and he vows I am an evil spirit."

"It is not much of a laughing matter," I answered. "Signor Rota recognised me and you will have your house ransacked before long, Nasone. What is best to be done?"



"That is certain to follow," said Nasone, wiping his eyes, "and for all that you are welcome to stay with me as long as you please, you will be safer elsewhere. Yet there is no hurry, we can decide by and by whither you shall go, and moreover I must have a talk with you, Camilla."

His easy way of speaking allayed my fears that Signor Rota would molest us, and Nasone, vowing that His Excellency's plate might go unfinished, closed his shop for the day. He said nothing of the damage we had done his floor, his only regret being that the tax-gatherer had escaped without a worse hurt than having his smart coat rent and dusted. We sat late into the night and arranged that the best thing to do was for Martin and myself to rejoin the troops at Corte, where at least some news would be heard of Cesario and our other friends.

"But I have a particular desire for returning to Ajaccio presently," argued Martin, "and if it had not been for that accident of falling upon Signor Rota, nothing should drive me out of the town now I am safely in it. But I see your danger, Camilla, and as we came into the town together so will we leave."

This being agreed upon, and the object I had had in seeing Nasone obtained, although the news he told me concerning my affairs was very unsatisfactory, Martin and I helped him drag some bedding from the inexhaustible closet, that was fuller of things than ever, and Nasone bade us good night.



"To-morrow," said he, "we will arrange for your getting out of Ajaccio." And Martin was in the act of thanking him for his kindness when suddenly the still night was disturbed by the violent ringing of the house bell. Nasone ran to the window, opening it sufficiently wide enough to allow him to see below, and after a moment's scrutiny came back to us, on the tips of his slippered feet.

"The Saints protect us!" he exclaimed, "for never yet was I so troubled by a customer. Rota the tax-gatherer is below, strutting before the house."

"Then he has come for something more than His Excellency's plate," laughed Martin.



## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### UNLOOKED-FOR AID.

**T**HE ring was repeated, and then a loud knock was given on the house door.

"I must descend and speak to the fellow," said Nasone, "meantime you must remain quiet here. If he hear you, there is no saying but what he will bring an armed force and search the house," and with this he went downstairs, we going close to the window, hearing him unbolt the door, and then Signor Rota's voice.

"The two men who were with you this day!" exclaimed Rota. "I must see them at once."

"Do you suppose they are here," answered Nasone. "Would they dare stay, think you, after what happened?"

"Then where have they gone?" demanded the other, "because His Excellency has heard the whole story, and said he, 'these men have no lawful business in Ajaccio,' and in that I agreed with His Excellency."

"You would agree with anybody," replied Nasone, "and if you wish to take vengeance on the poor



men, begin at once to seek for them. Try the road leading to Monte Rotondo, or the waste land of Malava, or the waters in the harbour, but wherever you seek, begin to do so at once, for I am about to go to bed, and to talk with you, Signor Rota, at this hour of darkness, does not please me."

"They have fled, you say?" answered Rota. "They have been terrified by thinking of my wrath."

"Who would not be terrified," replied Nasone. "You are enough to daunt the courage of the bravest."

"And maybe they are escaping to the mountains?"

"I tell you to seek them on the road thither, and I can say no more. The night air blows shrewdly, and therefore I will close my door," and we above heard him do so, followed by the retreating footsteps of Signor Rota.

Nasone gave a sour look at us when he came back to the room.

"You must remain hidden here until the chance offers itself of escaping. That fellow is set on your being apprehended, and therefore it will be only wise to alter your plans. Wait here a day or two."

This we agreed to do, and to shorten my story at this point I may say that it was a week before we ventured out of the house. I think Rota was not so important a person as he wished to appear, yet Nasone told us that strangers in Ajaccio were eyed with suspicion and likely to be arrested, but at last he consented to our making the attempt to leave the town.



"Let us put a bold front on it," said Martin as we sat one morning, impatient at the restraint which had been placed on our movements, "and by that I mean walking out of the town through the gates, as people might do in an ordinary way."

"We shall be stopped and questioned," I answered, "which means that we shall be prevented from escaping."

"But it is useless, our waiting here," he retorted, "and if you have **no** business to attend to, I have, Camilla."

He spoke so seriously for him, for Martin was too light-hearted to do that ordinarily, that I glanced at him in surprise.

"What business can you have to attend to?" I asked, but he made no reply, turning to Nasone who was looking out of the window at that moment.

"Am I not right, Signor Matra?" he exclaimed. "Will it not be the best plan to walk straight out of the town?"

"If that miscreant Rota does not observe your going," replied Nasone. "He has a good memory for faces, and owes both you and Camilla a grudge. Moreover Rota and those like him have the upper hand of their fellow-countrymen now and will be harder than ever they were before, seeing that this unfortunate revolt has failed. I have had news brought me that the condition of the country is worse now than it has ever been, and as helpless and hopeless as can be. The leaders of the people



can do no more, their resources are exhausted, and before long the oppressors will begin their revenge upon us. There will be hangings and shootings, the sending of brave men to the slave galleys, and worse than that, the putting of fresh taxes upon us."

"But in the mean time we must get back to our friends," I answered, thinking of Cesario, Serafino, and the others, whom I had not seen for so long.

"Then there is only one way to do that," cried Martin, "and that is the method I proposed. We will walk straight to the gate, give 'Good-bye' civilly to the sentry, and be out amongst the mountains before he has time to regret he did not stop us with his demand to know our business."

"I have been considering whether you might not escape by the sea," said Nasone, "yet it is impossible. The harbour is closed, watched, and guarded, there is no chance that a boat would be allowed to go without being examined, for even the coral fishers are searched, as though the poor fellows were very thieves, and therefore it is not to be thought of."

"Nor is staying here longer," replied Martin, "so get ready, Camilla, and we will start at once."

He was so eager to be gone, that I saw it would be of no avail to persuade him to delay. I also was anxious to gain some tidings of my old companions, whilst to remain in Ajaccio was almost as hazardous to our freedom, as the attempt to leave the town would be, and so when we had finished the meal which Nasone had prepared for us, and I



had received a packet from him that was to be given to Cesario, if "Fortune granted I should ever see him again," as Nasone said, Martin and I went down the gloomy staircase, and for an instant or two paused at the bolted door. Then Nasone opened it, and out into the brilliant sunshine passed Martin and I, hearing the door shut gently, whilst without a look except straight before us we walked in the direction of the fortifications.

The warm air and gentle breeze came refreshingly after our long stay in Nasone's house, and Martin's spirits seemed to have returned suddenly, making him reckless of being observed and more eager than ever to quit the town. But with all that, he must needs stop to buy some fruit from an old woman who sat beneath the shelter of a blue umbrella at the corner of a street, even asking her some questions regarding the very man from whom danger to us was to be expected.

"And so Signor Rota has taxed your fruit barrow," laughed Martin as he began eating the fruit he had purchased.

"They will be taxing us presently for breathing the air," cried the old woman, whose face was more wrinkled than the skin of a late orange, "and never will they find one better to wring money from people than Rota, the stony-hearted. Yet there are times when even he meets his equal, for the story goes that he was thrown, like the rank weed he is, from out the cottage of Napolino the cowherd--



who lives on the road leading to Corte, and that Rota came back to Ajaccio with a torn coat and bruised moreover from head to foot. I heard the story from one who saw the thing done, and never before was I pleased to see the tax-gatherer. I laughed in his face next time he came for the tax from me, and asked him to tell me the story himself. Holy Saint Antonio never showed more pain on his griddle, than did Rota, when I asked this, and said he, 'Those who have defied the law, which was defied and insulted when the brigands intercepted my lawful acts and deeds, shall suffer for it yet.' Ah! but I remember Rota's evil eye glancing round as he said that, and he will be as good as his promise."

Martin looked at me, and I plucked him by the sleeve to hasten him. The old woman had become fierce and talkative, and would have spoken until nightfall I think; whilst my companion showed no haste to be gone.

"So Signor Rota will have his revenge, you say?" answered Martin.

"Revenge indeed!" exclaimed the old woman shrilly. "He will have the blood of those who have offended him. It is an easy affair to get an enemy shot or hanged just now. One has but to call him a rebel and——" here she put her hand around her scraggy throat, giving a gurgle as she did this.

"Come, Martin," I cried, having no liking for her chatter. "We shall be late unless you hasten!"



"So Rota will do this?" and Martin repeated the old woman's gesture. "Well, then, it will be wise if his enemy gets beyond his clutches."

"Nobody ever did that yet," giggled the woman, "and nobody ever will. Rota will have them, mark me."

"I rather doubt that," replied Martin, and with this we hurried from the fruit-seller, going in the direction of the gate.

We had reached to within a short distance of this when I suddenly stopped, for standing at the guard house were some soldiers, who drew into line as an officer came out. There were twenty or more of them drawn up before the closed gates, and for us to have attempted to pass them would have been madness.

"This way, Martin!" I exclaimed under my breath. "We must wait until the soldiers have gone. This is a quiet street enough—nobody will molest us."

"Not so fast, Camilla," replied Martin excitedly, "for here comes an old friend of ours, whom I saw last in a cloud of dust, after falling through Nasone's ceiling upon the good gentleman," and as my companion spoke I saw coming toward me, with his jaunty step and smirking face, the tax-gatherer Rota. I think he saw us also at the same moment, for he quickened his pace into a trot, nodding his head and smacking his lips when within a dozen paces of us.



"Run, Martin!" I cried, and we slipped through a narrow opening between the houses. "Maybe we shall escape him yet."

"I am not going to run from a tax-gatherer," laughed Martin. "Nay, more than that, I have a particular reason for speaking with him, only the quieter the place for our conversation the better."

"It is certain arrest," I exclaimed, for Martin's way of speaking made me think him to have lost his reason. "Here he comes."

"Ambling like a well-fed hackney," replied Martin, moving slowly forward. "He will be alongside us in a few moments and throw his grappling-irons aboard. What a sweet movement he has!" and then I heard Signor Rota cry to us to stop, in a shriller voice than the old fruit-seller's. Martin turned round in an instant, and very red in the face and panting heavily, so that his speech came in jerks, the tax-gatherer stood before us, brandishing his walking cane.

"At last," cried he, "I have succeeded in discovering you, and there shall be no running away this time I promise you. Yes—there is no mistake—you are the villain who assisted in the attack upon the law—which shall make you pay smartly for the same. You, I mean," and he stretched out his hand to grasp me.

"Gently, good sir," exclaimed Martin, interposing himself between us. "You are over eager, and



before you make us your prisoners, let me have a word with you."

"Not a single word," cried Rota, "I have no time nor liking for talking to such as you, so come with me."

Martin during this little conversation had been walking onward, Signor Rota following him, and at last we all three had reached a spot that was so quiet that our voices seemed to sound quite loudly. On one side of the path lay a high wall, and on the other the ground sloped downward in the direction of the fortified entrance gate to Ajaccio. There was not anyone to interrupt us, nor to lend help to deliver us from our dangerous strait, and my heart sank within me, on thinking that Martin and I would certainly be in prison presently, instead of breathing the mountain air and rejoining our friends.

"Not a word more will I speak," exclaimed Signor Rota, "nor take one more step out of my way. I have you both in my grasp now, and His Excellency shall have you before him ere many hours are gone."

"But we are leaving Ajaccio," answered Martin, and I saw a merry twinkle come into his eyes. "We were on the point of going out of the town when we met you."

"Oh indeed," cried the other, "then it was a lucky thing I encountered you."

"Never anything happened more fortunately,"



answered Martin. "For without your aid, worthy Signor Rota, we could never have passed the sentry in safety."

"My aid!" shouted the tax-gatherer. "Oh, that is very good—very good—my aid indeed to your escape! say rather my aid in getting you both hanged."

But before he could well finish the sentence he had given a squeak of pain, for Martin had seized him by the arm, and there flashed a dagger before Signor Rota's eyes.

"You will be obliged to listen," cried Martin, as he called to me. "Take his other arm, Camilla, for we must bring this good gentleman to reason, by fair means or foul."

"Let go your hold!" screamed Rota. "Beware of touching me. I am the law, and not to be handled like an ordinary man."

"I do not intend to handle you like an ordinary man would be dealt with," answered Martin, a change coming into his face, so that it looked as it did when he fought the ruffianly soldier, "but I am going to run this dagger into your heart."

I felt the tax-gatherer suddenly become quite limp and helpless as I held him, and his eyes had a wild terror in them.

"You dare not murder me," he gasped, shrinking from Martin's dagger. "I'm an officer of the law and His Excel——"

"His Excellency will never know who killed you,"



replied Martin calmly. "You have too many enemies for that. So make ready—I'll give you three minutes longer to live."

At this Signor Rota slipped down until he was almost on his knees, so that we had to hold him up.

"Mercy!" he cried in a tone of horror. "Good gentlemen, I pray you to do me no harm. Help!" and he gave a shriek which I stopped by placing my hand over his mouth.

"Humph," said Martin, frowning down at our victim. "You ask for something you know very little about, by all accounts. Yet I am willing to grant it. But you must do exactly what I tell you."

"I will do anything," moaned Rota, "so that you take the horrible weapon from before my eyes."

"Then you will go with us to the gate," replied Martin. "And if we are questioned, say that we are friends of yours. We are bent on getting out of Ajaccio, and if we do so in safety I promise to spare your life. If we are molested I promise also that you shall die that very instant. Do you agree to this?"

"I will agree to everything, except being slaughtered like a lamb," exclaimed the tax-gatherer, straightening himself. "Come with me now, and let us get from the lonely spot, which has the very air of death itself. Come."

So with this Martin slipped Signor Rota's arm through his own, and I took the other, we going back to the street leading to the entrance gate.



Once our unwilling companion resisted us, but Martin's dagger was held so closely to Signor Rota's back, that I suppose the point of the weapon pricked him, for he uttered a curious cry of pain and alarm as he stepped out briskly again.

"We will have a clear understanding," said Martin, as we came in view of the soldiers who were still drawn up in line. "My mind misgives me that you may betray us, good honest Signor Rota, therefore remember when you speak to the officer, whom you are well acquainted with doubtless, that I am listening, and that the first word you say which would raise suspicions of us, will be the last you will ever speak. I shall hold my dagger at your back, under your cloak, and I give you fair warning. Say but a word that may endanger us, and I will kill you!"

Then we marched on once more, Signor Rota so swayed between rage and fear as to be quite dumb, and in this fashion did we reach the gate.

"You will tell the officer we are friends of yours, and are going upon a visit together," whispered Martin.

"And that I am the dearest friend you have amongst all your acquaintances," I added, giving him a grip that made him wince.

"Now begin," whispered Martin hoarsely again, for we had come at last at the gate, and the tall officer was casting a threatening look at us. His face cleared, however, when he recognised Signor Rota, whom he addressed.



"One rarely sees you in this part of Ajaccio," he began, looking from our companion to us, "and these gentlemen with you are——" but here he stopped as if something had come across his mind, and I saw Martin's hand slip under Rota's cloak, the hilt of the dagger making a comical little hump in it.

"Two of my dearest friends," replied the tax-gatherer, "but truth to tell, *Capitano*, they——" and at this point he ceased speaking abruptly, also giving utterance to a kind of smothered "Oh!" and a gasp.

"We are about to pay a visit together, *Capitano*," he exclaimed, bending like a bow to escape the dagger point at his back, "and the Saints forbid that you keep us waiting at the gate, seeing that this is truly a matter of life or death."

"You are about to visit someone who is ill, maybe," answered the officer, giving the order to open the small gate. "So fare you well, Signor Rota," and I was rejoicing that we were free at last, when the speaker stepped before us.

"These are strangers in Ajaccio, I perceive," he said, staring at Martin and myself, "yet I think I have seen this fellow before," and he touched me. "At Aleria, unless I am mistaken."

One word, one gesture of alarm or confusion, and we should have been undone; but I saw the hump come again beneath Signor Rota's cloak, as he sprang nimbly back to me.

"They are new-comers to Ajaccio, *Capitano*,"



he screamed, "who are engaged with me in the collection of the taxes. This one is called Augustini Pietro Navarino, and this one (he twisted sideways, pointing to Martin) is named Tomaso Diavolo, and never a better name had anyone than he, nor one more suitable to his nature."

The officer put his lips together until they were like a line, keeping his keen eyes fixed on me.

"There was a man, very like you, Signor Augustini Pietro Navarino, with whom I crossed swords at Aleria," he said, "but as you appear to be a friend of Rota——"

"The dearest friend I have in the world," interrupted the tax-gatherer with a scream, and for some reason the officer burst into a laugh as past the grinning soldiers, with Martin hugging Signor Rota under the cloak, we went through the gate, out into the road which led to liberty.

For a good half dozen miles we kept Signor Rota prisoner, although he vowed that his services were more urgently needed in Ajaccio that day than they had ever been before; but there was too much danger for us to allow him to return home until Martin and I had put a safe distance between Ajaccio and ourselves.

"You will remember this pleasant journey we have made together, Signor Rota," said Martin, as we came at length to a part of the country which was quite unknown to me.

"I shall remember many other things," replied



the tax-gatherer, gnashing his teeth, for Martin stood laughing at him, "and if the time comes, you also, my friend, shall recollect this day."

"I shall never forget your kindness to us," laughed Martin, "because without your ready wit, Camilla and I might be in prison at this very moment, instead of being where we are. You have done one good action at least, gentle Signor Rota, and now fare ye well."

Signor Rota turned on his heel and walked so quickly from us that he seemed to be running, disappearing like an evil spirit into the shadow of a clump of cork trees, and Martin watched him go.

"There is a long rent in Signor Rota's coat," he said, "just between his shoulders; and now, Camilla, tell me what part of Corsica we have got to."

I looked round, but the scene was strange to me, and I looked for some familiar landmark by which we might be guided into the road leading to Corte, but without seeing anything except the rising mountains before us and the sloping country by which we had come from Ajaccio. It was an unknown land, and for a moment or two I stood, uncertain which way to turn.



## CHAPTER XXIX.

### "A WONDERFUL COMING."

I SUPPOSE it was the haste with which we had left the walls of Ajaccio behind that occasioned us to miss our way, but whatever the reason might have been, I can only say that we became at last lost in a gloomy ravine, unable to distinguish the path through it, with the hill-tops frowning above like giants to prevent our further progress.

"This is not the road to Corte," exclaimed Martin, "and that is the only thing I am certain about."

"Except that we have quite lost our road," I answered, "or that maybe some band like the Red Gambini's will beset us presently."

"They are welcome to all the wealth I have about me," replied Martin carelessly; "but the delay in returning to Farmer Vico's house troubles me."

"We are going to Corte." I exclaimed.

"We are going to the farmer's," he answered, "if I can find my way thither, and afterwards maybe to Corte; but at this moment we may be going back to Ajaccio for what I know, so let us rest contented with being where we are until daybreak."



There was no help for it but to follow Martin's advice, and that night we slept beneath the shelter of an overhanging rock. Nasone had provided us with some food, and what remained of our midday meal we ate for supper, after which, tired from our long walk, for we had travelled many miles since parting from Signor Rota, I was very soon asleep.

Morning's light brought no hope with it, however, of our recovering the road to Corte. Everywhere, turn which way we might, were the mountains rearing their heads into the blue sky, a solitude undisturbed by any living thing surrounding us on every side. Accustomed as I was to the loneliness of the mountains, the scene impressed me, and Martin walked silently by my side, as we wound round the heaving side of a great hill.

"I would give a goodly sum to know what part of the world we are in," he said, as though he had been considering the matter during that long silence of his. "Try and guess where we are, Camilla."

"I cannot do that even, yet there is the feel of the sea in the air," I replied, "we are not far from the coast, I think. There was a mist, which the sun has driven away, and that comes from the sea."

I was not wrong in supposing us to be approaching the coast, for soon after this, as we clambered our way through a privet thicket, we stood within sight of the sea, that lay sparkling in the warm sunshine. And on the left of where we were standing rose at a distance of a mile or more the grey ruins of a



fortress, at seeing which a crowd of wild recollections came into my mind, for the grey tower was the fortress of Aleria, which I had helped to wrest from the hands of the Genoese, and below it lay the little town, dipping into the shining water.

"Yonder is Aleria," I cried, "and we shall find our way to Corte without trouble, Martin!"

"If the road leads to Farmer Vico's," he replied, "because I am going there, and to no other place until I have been there."

"You are strangely set on seeing Signor Vico," I said, "or maybe it is Dame Ursulo you are thinking of—What vessel is that?" For just at this moment a ship under full sail came rounding the promontory on our right hand.

In an instant Martin had lost his listless air, but for a time he could do nothing but gaze intently at the vessel. There was a flag flying from the mast-head, and his eyes seemed devouring the sight of it. "It is the flag of England!" he shouted, giving a great leap in the air. "The flag I sail under, Camilla, and the ship is making for Aleria, or may I never have the handling of a rope again."

"Then let us get there and see what Fortune is bringing to Corsica again," I answered, remembering the English ships that had brought us stores and help at the hour of need before.

Martin waited a few moments, in which we watched the ship as she ploughed her way under full sail toward the shore, and we saw a hundred



flags or more hoisted, making her the gayest spectacle I had witnessed for many a long day. From her stern floated a great banner, having a gaudy coat of arms emblazoned on it, and the decks were crowded with men.

All these things we regarded with wondering eyes, and then began making our way to Aleria, meeting presently some groups of men hurrying thither also, so that as we neared the place we were with a crowd which grew greater every moment, until it joined the townspeople thronging the wide, sloping street that leads down through Aleria to the sea.

"There is some stirring business a-foot," said Martin, as we went past a house from the open windows of which could be heard voices in animated conversation, "and I have already seen some faces that I remember. Yes, there goes one of General Giafferi's troopers, and unless my ears have deceived me, it was a voice you ought to know better than I, Camilla, which was speaking in the room we passed just now."

"There is such a hubbub, that I could not distinguish one voice from another," I replied as we hastened onward; "But yonder goes the fellow with whom you fought, Martin, and in the distance is someone very like Serafino," and so excited was I by the unexpected sight that I gave a shout of joy, in which those nearest to me joined, waving their caps, and then Martin and I ran at full speed to where the big figure had been not a moment before; yet so great was the press and movement of the



crowd that I had lost sight of it almost immediately, finding myself hurried down to the beach where was a throng of grave-looking men, whose dress and bearing betokened them to be gentlemen, and foremost amongst them were Signor Hyacinthus Paoli, with some of the other leaders in the revolt, whom I had seen in the market-place of Corte when the insurrection was proclaimed.

It was a sight never to be forgotten which Aleria saw that day, nor the events that were to follow the coming of the ship, from which high above the fluttering array of flags that bedecked her from stem to stern, waved the English ensign. Along the shore ranged a line of spectators, who kept apart a little space from Hyacinthus Paoli and his companions, and between the rippling fringe of the sea and the low coast stretched a strip of golden sand. Above us the burning sun sent its glittering rays upon the ship, making everything aboard her plainly visible as she came within a short distance of land, dropping anchor a few moments afterwards, and a ringing cheer went up from the expectant throng. The help so long waited and hoped for had come at last; the means by which the struggle with our oppressors might be continued had been brought, and amid a silence, more profound by following the shout of triumph, we waited with eager eyes, watching the preparations in progress upon the newly-arrived vessel.

Three boats had meantime been lowered from her,



and into these got a number of gaily dressed men who remained erect after reaching the boats, having their heads uncovered and their faces upturned toward the vessel's deck. Then a salute of fifteen guns bellowed out, the reports following each other at regular intervals, and when the last one had ceased, a shrill cheer came shoreward from the boats, through the cloud of smoke. As the smoke lifted lazily, like a curtain rising, I saw descending the side of the ship a strangely attired man, who held a curious staff which glittered like gold, and with this he seemed to exercise a sway over those standing in the boats, for as he waved the shining staff slowly in a half circle, they bowed themselves—one indeed bent so low that he was near to falling into the sea—and some kind of musical instrument was played as the strange man stepped majestically into the largest of the three boats. There was a row of faces leaning over the side of the ship as he took his seat, and the cheer was raised again when the boats moved toward the shore, the one carrying the curious newcomer being between the others, and in a few moments they were close to the land. As they ran on the sandy beach, those in the smaller boats leaped nimbly out, and formed into two lines, leaving a passage between them, and down this came the man whom I had seen leaving the ship, who walked with the stateliest air imaginable, still waving his gilded staff.

I saw Hyacinthus Paoli, and those with him,



hurrying down to where the newcomer stood gazing loftily about him, but of them I took no heed, for there was enough to look and wonder at in this curiously dressed stranger. He was arrayed in a long caftan of scarlet silk, and wore spangled trousers such as the Moors wear (for of these people I had seen pictures at Fabiani's), and long yellow shoes with pointed toes. There was a great, broad-brimmed hat of black velvet on his head, and a plume of feathers waved down his back, whilst to complete his dress, he wore a wide yellow girdle in which were thrust pistols and a curved sword. But great beyond all these things was the bearing of the man, and the manner of his looking upward at the throng and around him at the town and towering mountains, for although I had only heard kings and conquerors spoken of I felt that no king could have looked and walked more majestically than did this stranger. He was a fair-complexioned man with long, light moustaches, and not much above the average height, although the curled white wig, on the top of which was perched the flapping hat, made him appear a head taller than his companions. There were a dozen of these in an attitude of reverence on either side, and past them he stalked, holding his staff before him—as one would hold a lamp—and then I saw Paoli meet him, making a grave bow as he did so.

“Welcome to Corsica, most honourable Theodore,” I heard Paoli say, for in spite of the newcomer's grandeur Martin and I had struggled through



the crowd up to where he stood. "Thrice welcome, at this hour!"

And Theodore, as Paoli named him, stood a-tip-toe of his yellow boots and gave a flourish of his glittering staff, whilst those with Paoli stood bowing in a row, and the on-lookers sent up a cheer which was joined in like an echo from aboard ship. There was a dwarfish drummer I remember (as one will trifling circumstances in the midst of important events) who appeared suddenly from one of the boats, running until he stood before the magnificent stranger, and the elfish fellow gave such a rattle on his drum as to almost drown the answer which Theodore gave to Hyacinthus Paoli. But someone seized the drummer by the collar, swinging him aside, and I saw the retainers drop on one knee, whilst with the greatest solemnity Theodore spoke again.

"I am come to your country," he began slowly, looking round at us, "to save you. Your troubles, your bravery, your long suffering have gained my sympathy, and I am here to show that sympathy by deeds and gifts. For a long time preparations have been in progress for the succour of your countrymen, Signor Paoli, and behold the fruits of my exertions." And at this Theodore waved his staff in the direction of the ship, where already active workers had begun to unload her. The boats had returned to the vessel, and barrels of ammunition, bales of goods, and other things were being brought to land.

There was such a royal manner accompanying



Theodore's words, which were, after all, without much solid meaning I thought, that everyone who listened seemed fascinated. There was some further conversation between him and our leaders, after which a procession was formed, at the head of which the elfish drummer placed himself, nobody hindering him, and to the rub-a-dub-dub, of his drum the procession went up the hilly street of the town, followed and beset by the streaming crowd, until Theodore and his retainers, with Hyacinthus Paoli and the others, disappeared into a house, and Martin and I went down again through the crowd to the shore.

"Who is this wonderful stranger?" I asked, "and where has he come from?"

"Here comes someone who can tell us, maybe," cried Martin, running forward to where a burly figure stood in the midst of a little knot of men, and who turning round at my companion's shout of recognition, answered it with another, and I saw my old comrade Serafino.

Although he was ragged and wellnigh shoeless Serafino had never worn a happier look than when with his big hands outstretched he rushed toward me, uttering my name in a way that proved his delight.

"Better even than the coming of that German baron Theodore," exclaimed he, "is the seeing you again, Camilla, for the news came to us that you had been killed by Gambini and his band. This



will be a glad surprise for Cesario, who is in yonder house with the others, welcoming the Baron of Neu-hoff. Tell me your history quickly, as we get away from this rabble."

"But how came you yourself in Aleria?" cried Martin, who had been shaking hands for a minute or longer with Serafino, and at this our newly found comrade gave out such a roar of laughter that it could have been heard a mile off.

"That is my story," he answered, "and has nothing more in it than this. After we had been driven back from our position by the Genoese, we had a week of starving. Then a day or two of hope, hearing that help was coming to us from across the water; and so when the ship which you see there was expected, such of us as could get here, came to view the sight. Cesario told me more than many of the others heard, and that this German who has arrived is to do great things for Corsica. He has riches and power, courage and strength, friends without number and companions galore, he is a Grandee of Spain, a Lord of Great Britain, a Peer of France, a Count of the German Empire, and a Prince of Russia to boot, and if such a man cannot help us, who can?"

"He has been expected?" I exclaimed. "Paoli and the others have been waiting for his arrival, you say?"

"I am not in their secrets," replied Serafino, "but when you see Cesario, he will satisfy your curiosity.



At the present moment I am only concerned to satisfy my hunger, for not even the sight of a Russian Prince will make up for the need of a meal. Oh, but it has been a sorry time of privation since I saw you both last, such thirsts, such starvings, such dreams of good food and such awakenings to renewed hunger, that I had rather see a stew of sheep's meat than the finest baron in all Germany," and Serafino ended his speech with a snatch of his one song for joy as we three walked arm in arm through the crowd to where, he solemnly assured us, a worthy woman had undertaken to provide his dinner, for a promise of payment.

During the meal we heard that Massoni had been left badly wounded at a cottager's near the scene of the defeat which the Corsican troops had sustained.

"But it is not Massoni's time yet for dying," remarked Serafino, "and we shall see him anon in the thick of the fighting, for now that this German baron is come we shall have plenty of it. But Cesario will tell you all the news, and therefore, when we have eaten our dinner, let us get to him."

"Has anything been seen or heard of our old friend Poli?" I asked, and at this Serafino burst into a roar of laughter.

"Not even his shadow has been seen," he answered, "yet I heard tell that his house door stood unbolted in Corte and that the fierce figure of a woman flitted in and out through it, like a bat at nightfall—his housekeeper I take the figure to be,



and although Poli fears those whom he has deceived, he fears this she-dragon a good deal more. But there will be time to talk of him presently, and of those whom you remember, Camilla—Fabiani Brasco and others. Just now we have the Baron of Neuhoff to consider, and by the sound of the trampling feet outside, he is stirring."

The rub-a-dub of the drum outside could be heard, and having satisfied his hunger at last Serafino and we left the house, making our way to where a throng had gathered outside the place in which the magnificent stranger had been entertained by Hyacinthus Paoli and the other leaders. Here we met Cesario, whose joy at seeing me kept him for some moments from telling us the story we were all longing to hear. And when he did so, half the tale was lost amid the confusion which prevailed in Aleria that day. The crowd grew greater each moment, for the news had come that the baron was preparing for his journey to Cervione, where a house had been made ready for his occupancy, and although not more than a dozen people knew at that moment the meaning of his presence, nor the purpose of his errand, we all cheered him until the mountains echoed, when with his kindly air, and in garments even more wonderful than at first Theodore of Neuhoff stood in the narrow doorway of that little house in Aleria, surveying the excited throng with a well satisfied look on his fair face.

Down on the beach meantime, the unloading of



the vessel and been proceeding busily, before the eyes of the multitude. Cannons and muskets, clothing and food, together with money and ammunition had been brought to us without stint, and never before had such gifts been more acceptable, nor the donor of them more belauded than now. We, in the upper part of the little town, could hear the cheerful bustle of the busy workers on shore, and when with a reverence never excelled Paoli and the others made way for the Baron, so that he might take his place at the head of the procession, it seemed as though all our troubles and wrongs were forgotten and a time of peace and plenty dawned at last.

Through the street, out into the white dusty road we trooped, the elfish drummer beating time to our march, and at last the town of Cervione was reached. It was the bishop's house in which the new-comer was to be lodged, and there Martin and I saw him disappear with his companions. Cesario was of these, and it was not until the following day that we saw our old comrade again, nor learnt the history of Theodore of Neuhoﬀ and his purpose in coming to Corsica.



## CHAPTER XXX.

### THE KING IS CROWNED.

**A**LTHOUGH Cesario told us a great deal, it was not until long after the events I have narrated in the previous chapter that I learnt the whole history of the Westphalian baron who became king of Corsica, and because that history has always been to me one of the strangest, and Theodore of Neuhoff one of the boldest adventurers as well as one of the most successful ever known, I will proceed to briefly tell the one and describe the other, at this point in my story.

The curious stranger was a German, who when a youth had served as page at the court of the Duchess of Orleans, from whence he entered the Spanish service, returning some years after to France. Here he joined himself with speculators, being at one time possessed of riches, and at another time miserably poor, and it was said of him that he had experience of everything, seen everything, thought, plotted, enjoyed, and been deprived of everything, until at last, having exhausted every form of happiness, he resolved to become a King. At first his



resolve was to be monarch of Trebizonde, but happening to meet some Corsicans who had been brought prisoners to Genoa, he altered his plans.

How he travelled through Europe, enlisting help and sympathy, I need not pause to tell, but his tireless energy and cleverness at last resulted in his obtaining the means necessary for his project, and when this had been achieved he suddenly landed on the shore of Corsica in the manner already told, at the hour of our greatest need, being saluted as the saviour of the country, with honours such as a king would have received.

Such then was Theodore's history, and with his person I had full opportunity of becoming acquainted, by being brought into close association with him. His disposition was good-natured and cheerful, but of his learning those able to judge spoke but little. I think his cleverness would be best described as cunning, and his warm friendship but as the use of those with whom he surrounded himself. He had a magnificent way of making pretension, so that even when his resources were exhausted, the manner in which he promised further supplies and the confidence which those promises aroused, were almost equal to arms and ammunition themselves. He had a ready smile and gracious bearing, that impressed us all favourably, I remember; whilst the rewards, and promises of rewards that were as good wellnigh, were eagerly accepted by those who were able to do Theodore the slightest service.



It was through Cesario that Martin and I were brought into intimate connection with the King, as indeed I must call him, and a little room in the bishop's house at Cervione was obtained for our use. Cesario himself was already one of the King's most trusted attendants, having had the post of Commander of Theodore's body-guard entrusted to him. He was General Arrighi now, in a uniform glittering with gold lace, and Serafino was next to him in dignity. I know not what rank Serafino held, but he ruled the body-guard with a rod of iron, drilling them carelessly in the little courtyard of the bishop's house, and making his voice heard continually through the whole of Cervione. These things, however, were after Theodore's coronation, which ceremony it was decided should be performed upon his arrival in Corsica, for it appeared that the Baron's plans had been well known and approved of by the leaders in the revolt, and before many days had gone by, the deputies—there were two from each commune of the island—came in a ragged body to the bishop's house with the purpose of offering the crown of Corsica to Baron Theodore, who received so many of the deputation as could squeeze themselves into the room, and the speech he made on that occasion made up for all the hardships the Corsicans had endured hitherto.

Martin and I were stifling in a corner, for what with Serafino and his soldiers, the crowd of people who were around Theodore's chair, and the



struggling mass of deputies, there was but little space left for breathing in, but what mattered that in the face of the purpose for which the assembly had come together. I was glad when it was performed, however, and we were free to move again, although Serafino must needs form his soldiers into order first, and crush his way at their head out of the room, with the drummer, whom nobody could subdue, banging his drum-head like a threshing floor.

Then followed the coronation the day after, and that also was an imposing sight, although so poor were we, that there was not sufficient gold to make a crown, but one was twined of laurel and oak twigs and placed on the head of the first and last King of Corsica in the common room of the convent of Alesani, which is hard by Cervione. The newly-crowned monarch, amid the acclamations of all present, signed the great sheet of parchment whereon were written the articles of the Constitution, and swore to maintain them; and everything seemed to have changed from despair to hope and confidence. There were banquetings and merry-makings far and near, the sounds of bellowing volleys of cannon fire, as the news spread, and serene in the midst of this universal rejoicing King Theodore of Corsica was carried back to the bishop's house in Cervione, which was henceforward to be known as his palace, and here after long hours of revelling Serafino joined us.

“Never did I think to see a day such at this,”



he shouted, flinging a gilded casque which he had worn into a corner, "nor that Serafino the Younger—which is myself—would ever be second in command of a king's body-guard. How have I played my part this day?—how did I look and bear myself?"

"Like a hero!" exclaimed Martin. "You were a sight never to be forgotten—nobler than King Theodore himself, and bigger than one of the sons of Anak."

"I know not whom that same Anak may be," replied Serafino, "but if he is in the service of the King I am ready to shake him by the hand. For this change that has come over me is marvellous. To think that once upon a time the *shirri* hunted me like a wild beast in the mountains; that I have been in danger of my life by the common hangman; that I have been hungry and thirsty, ragged and footsore, and am now a trusted officer of a king, having, besides, the right to wear a uniform more gorgeous than the dress of an Italian nobleman. I, Serafino the Younger—oh, but for wonders this time has never had its equal—and if your thirst has spared a drop of liquor pass me that pannikin, good Camilla, for what with the heat and need for talking my throat is as parched as the high road to Alesani, over which I have just passed."

"Where is Cesario?" I asked, laughing heartily at Serafino whose great honest face was ruddier than a love-apple. "Has he been with you?"

"Cesario indeed," cried Serafino, snapping his



fingers. "Why, where should he be but at the right hand of the King, who is minded to make Cesario chiefest of his military officers, and who knows but what I shall rise with him. Think of me as General Serafino—that has a goodly sound and only needs an allowance of money to give me every happiness. I will harry those who have harried me—the *shirri* shall be driven hither and thither, the hangman of Corte—stay, I will be a warm friend of that same hangman Tortoni, for I shall need his services. There will be plenty of work for his skilful hand, and the first one to be hanged shall be the notary Poli when I can catch him."

"But he is safe in Bastia," said I.

"We shall capture Bastia," retorted Serafino. "It is to be one of our first works after the Corsican army is reconstructed. Bastia, Porto Vecchio, Sartem, Ajaccio, they are all to fall, for what walls are stout enough, or enemy strong enough, to resist us, when Generalissimo Cesario Arrighi leads an army, and General Serafino is second in command?" And with this he began marching to and fro, roaring out the refrain of the old song "Eterna faremo vendetta," which I had heard first amid the wild recesses of the hills beyond Monte Rotondo, long ago. Then he explained to us that his presence was required at Court, and picking up the gilded casque Serafino strode out of the room with his sword clattering, and Martin and I were left alone.

"I wish you were able to stay in Corsica to see



what is to happen," I said, turning to my companion, "for that a wonderful change is in store for us is plainly to be perceived."


"Stay in Corsica?" cried Martin surprised. "What do you mean, Camilla?"

"You will sail in the English ship which goes in a few days, they say," I answered.

Martin shook his head. "I sail in no ship, until——" but here he stopped.

"Until when?" I enquired.

"I have given Signor Vico a promise," he answered, quite solemnly for him, "and not until that is fulfilled shall I quit Corsica." And although I tried my best to make him tell me more, not another word on the subject could I get from Martin.





## CHAPTER XXXI.

### THE PROGRESS OF THEODORE.

**N**OW that Theodore was in the possession of a royal title, those who had helped him to that dignity and maintained him in it were themselves ennobled. Nothing was easier than to become a lord or count, except maybe the being changed into a marquis. Giafferi and Hyacinthus Paoli were each this, and prime ministers also of the King; Castineta was made a count, and had the command of the town of Rostini; Cesario Arrighi a lord with the office of inspector-general of the royal troops, whilst besides those I have mentioned, margraves, lieutenant-generals, royal captains, chamberlains, ushers, chancellors and secretaries were in such abundance that it was more wonderful to meet with a plain man at court than one with some high-sounding title.

Of the Court itself I have the most vivid recollection, and can see before me now King Theodore seated in the bishop's chair—it made a tolerable throne when a cushion softened the seat, and Martin and I have often occupied that throne in jest—



with the gilded thing I have referred to previously, in his hand. The staff was Theodore's sceptre, without which he never administered justice, nor held a council, for all that it got sadly frayed ere the time came for him to lay it down for good. And the room which formed the principal meeting-place of the courtiers was so small that there was barely space enough for them to bow in, being shabby almost to ruin; although when the candles were lit, and the hangings displayed at night, the dust and raggedness of the place became hidden as it were. The house was always filled with people, some coming, some going, some with petitions (it was my duty to present them to the King, being a page of honour and having the title of Squire I remember) which contained every conceivable request, and not one of them but King Theodore read it, and sent the petitioner away happy with a glowing promise; and some people there were who came begging for a place at court, as though it were not overflowing with attendants and hangers-on already. However, all who asked had their requests granted, until General Serafino took the matter in hand, by placing a company of soldiers at the entrance of the house, who had orders to prevent strangers intruding themselves.

"There is little enough provisions left," he said to us one evening, as Martin and I sat with him in the guard room that had been the bishop's garden house, "and there are more to eat than will be



able to satisfy their hunger. I have consulted with the chief cook, and said he—yet but what matters what a chief cook may say?" and Serafino gave a twist to his moustache disdainfully.

"There is to be a banquet to-morrow," said Martin, "and I have been foraging for the cook. It is to be hoped there will be no more feasts until the ships come which the King has told us of. For although I went with a royal warrant in my hand, neither wine nor food could I get."

"Keep that news to yourself, Signor Martino," grinned Serafino, "although it is true as any ever known. Something will happen shortly, mark me. It is not to sit idle that King Theodore has ascended his throne."

"Nor to sit comfortably there either," retorted Martin. "For of all the miserable places to be seated in, commend me to the throne of Corsica."

Serafino was about to make a speech regarding the danger of talking treason, I think, when a message came to me that my attendance was required by His Majesty, whereupon I left my companions, and going across the dewy grass, entered the house.

King Theodore was pacing to and fro in a gorgeous dressing-gown, that had a long rent in it, which he was careful to hide now and again, forgetting it, I suppose, however, when he was engrossed in speaking to me. He had put aside the emblems of his royal state, and was an ordinary looking man with a careworn face and skin of marble. His head



was wrapped in a sort of turban, ill tied and dirty, and the curled wig hung upon the back of a broken chair. It was evident that something weighed heavily on the King's mind, and taking me by the arm, we walked up and down the room as though he were no more than the ordinary personage he looked. He had often treated me with friendliness and confidence, telling me many of the annoyances and troubles which he kept from others; and Martin also was a great favourite of the King, mainly because of my companion being an Englishman, and on the occasion I am speaking of Theodore asked me whether Martin would perform a service of some danger for him.

"It is to go to Ajaccio," explained the King, "where it behoves us to discover those who are friendly to our dynasty, and to gather information of other kinds."

"There was never anyone better fitted to be trusted upon such an embassy than Martin Chicheley," I answered. "He will go gladly, and he can be trusted."

"Yes," replied Theodore thoughtfully, "an Englishman's word before any other man's in the whole world. We can trust your friend Martin. Is he acquainted with the road to Ajaccio?"

"Nothing is easier than to find the way thither, Sire," I exclaimed, "nor will anything be more to Martin's liking than to go to the town."

"I would ask you to perform this service for us,"



continued Theodore, "but I cannot spare you from the Court just now. Bring Martin to our presence forthwith." And then it was that the King seemed to restore himself to his dignity, speaking in a tone of sudden pride as he took his curly wig from the chair, and placed it on his shaven head, after throwing the turban into a corner.

I went to the guard room, where Serafino was denouncing the wilful waste of giving a banquet when there was not a full cask of wine in the palace, nor a whole sheep in the larder, and beckoning to Martin I gave him King Theodore's message.

"Go to Ajaccio, do you tell me, Camilla?" cried Martin, leaping from his seat. "Ay, that I will right joyfully, for it has been the one thought in my mind these many days how to fetch that place."

"You may perchance encounter Signor Vico," I continued, "and if so say that I promise him he shall share in the good things the King has spoken about as coming to us. For Signor Vico did us a service I at least shall never forget."

"Ay, I shall see him," replied Martin shortly.

"And Dame Ursulo," I added.

"And Dame Ursulo," repeated Martin, as we went to the house.

"Nor must Lucia be forgotten," I said.

"There is no chance of Lucia being not remembered," said Martin. "And now you shall know the reason for my refusing a passage in the ship by which Baron Theodore came. "One was offered



me"—and I dare say my companion would have told me the cause of his staying in Corsica, but at that moment the dwarfish drummer came under our feet almost—he was for ever in somebody's way either within or without the palace—and because I had set a foot on him the imp raged like a snake almost.

I left Martin with his Majesty, from whom he received his instructions; but what these were, or what the nature of his errand was, other than I have already told, I cannot say. Suffice it, then, to say that early next morning Martin started on his journey, promising to see me again soon. Serafino turned out the guard, I remember, to honour our comrade's departure, and I saw Martin for the last time for many a day, waving his hand to us before he disappeared behind the brow of a hill.

There are many things which I might recount of the King and his councillors, the manner of our strange life whilst the Court remained at Cervione, and the shifts we were put to in living packed closely in the bishop's house; but at this length of time since then, these events seemed too trivial to be set down fully. I recollect, however, that the days went swiftly past without Martin returning to us, and how in that time King Theodore performed a task which I doubt very much whether any other man could have undertaken, and that was to induce his followers to forswear their private quarrels and take the oath of forgiveness toward their enemies. He was firm in his purpose for banishing the "Ven-



detta" from the island, and whether he succeeded or not, I know that all those, and they formed a large portion of his friends, who held it as a sacred trust almost, swore to forget their wrongs and allow their enemies to live in peace and security. I can never forget the sight of Cesario taking this oath, nor the struggle with his bitter memories that it cost him, but he responded outright to the solemn words of the court-chaplain, which freed Fabiani Brasco from the dread he had so long lived in. I remember Serafino too, as he stood looking more solemn than the court-chaplain himself, mouthing the oath as though it burnt his tongue.

"Thank the Saints!" whispered Serafino as he moved from the spot where the oath had been administered, "that I am done with the trial at last. It was easy to forgive some half dozen ancient foes of mine and I did so heartily, but the notary stuck in my throat, for his weazened face and withered legs seemed to be dancing before my face as I called them to mind. And, moreover, I had so long cherished the thought of slaying him that to be baulked of the pleasure was like taking a brimming cup from the lips of a parched man. However, I have hope still—there is yet the she-dragon to bring punishment on the villain, for if that fiery housekeeper of Signor Poli's does not make a quick end of him, what have such fire and brimstone as she, to say nothing of her long tongue, been created for?"



Serafino's mention of the notary, and the sight of Cesario's renunciation of his own life-long vengeance against my cousin, brought back to me the sense of my unfortunate condition, and the wrongs that Fabiani Brasco and Teodor had done me. Since the King's coming the stream of changing affairs had made me forgetful of my own, but that day which I have described thus briefly, when the "Vendetta" was put aside by my companions, was the time of my awakening to the realization that I had been deeply wronged. I remembered Nasone's words; the night scene wherein I had saved his life from being taken by Fabiani; and I resolved to use every means in my power to bring my treacherous kinsmen to justice.

The settlement of the family feuds being accomplished, King Theodore's army took the field against the Genoese, and in the month of April, 1736, the important town of Porto Vecchio was taken after a hardly contested battle. The fall of Sortene followed this, and although our enemies scoffed at and ridiculed the King of Corsica, it was soon proved that he was a formidable foe, and one whom they had to reckon with. He was a gallant soldier, in spite of his love of finery and empty show, and his bravery won him the admiration of his followers. And not only in the fighting did Theodore distinguish himself, but in the management and care with which he ruled the distracted country; and I believe he would have succeeded in giving it peace and



prosperity, if fate had not prevented him. He set up a mint, from which were issued coins of gold, silver, and copper, having a laurel-wreathed shield and the letters T.R. on one side, and the words "*pro bono et liberate*" on the other, of which coins I have three of the silver ones now by me. But alas, there were so few of them, and those so greedily clutched by grasping fingers before the coins were cold, as I may say, that the mint for all its show of providing money for the country, was little better than the other promises held out by the King. He was continually announcing the appearance of a friendly fleet, and a thousand eyes kept watch upon the waters, eagerly expecting a sight they were never to witness.

But there was work to do while waiting for reinforcements and help from other lands for the capture of Bastia, which was one of the most important strongholds remaining to the Genoese on the island. It may be truly stated that we had driven them from the interior, which, however, was left in a condition of great distress, the inhabitants murmuring sullenly against the King and his councillors, who alone seemed to flourish amid the desperate strait in which Corsica lay so helplessly.

To add to this direful condition yet another horror, the Genoese had let loose upon the country a band of blood-thirsty miscreants, composed of murderers, galley slaves, and banditti, which company was called the "Vittoli": and horrible deeds



were performed by these, who made inroads into the lonely spots, perpetrating outrages that I shrink from the description of. More than once King Theodore's soldiers had encountered detachments of the "Vittoli" and driven them back to the mountains, until at length it was thought that the band had been rendered powerless to do further harm.

The King led the attack upon Bastia in person, and after an unsuccessful assault had been made, the place was closely invested, General Giafferi being left in command of the besieging army. There were more important duties for the King to attend to than even the capture of Bastia, the state of the country requiring his presence at Corte and other places, and with a small bodyguard he quitted us for a time, giving, however, another of his faithful promises of returning shortly to complete the victory over the oppressors of his beloved country.

Nothing had been seen nor heard of Martin Chicheley since his leaving Cervione for Ajaccio, and a dismal foreboding filled me that some harm had happened to him. That he was faithless to his trust I never thought, but the countless dangers which doubtless he had encountered, I was confident, had prevented him from fulfilling it, and the grievous sorrow at our separation that possessed me, not even the incidents of besieging Bastia could remove.



## CHAPTER XXXII.

### AN UNEXPECTED MEETING.

**I**T was the day following the King's leaving us when I made my way to Serafino's tent, where, perplexed by a plan which had been set down on a huge sheet of paper for his guidance, I found him awaiting the arrival of Cesario.

"The plan may be plain to those who can understand it," growled Serafino, rubbing his head thoughtfully. "But I am not a man of learning, nor likely to be. At fighting I am at home, but with this mass of lines, figures, and letters confronting me I feel inclined to run away from the things. Look at this, Camilla—what is the meaning of this shape that is like nothing so much as a broken-backed cow—see it has a red line going through it in the direction of a man's hand. Bah—who could win a battle with all this to remember! Give me a sword in my grip and something to cut at, and I warrant there shall be one the less in the world ere I am defeated."

I glanced at the plan, which as Serafino said might be easy to comprehend by those who could under-



stand it, and must confess that if the capture of Bastia depended upon the plan being carried out by General Serafino, the town was never in a safer state than now.

"Perhaps Cesario can help you," I said, after a long look at the confused lines and letters.

"Cesario is a fighting man," growled Serafino, "but perchance the King has taken the pains to explain the plan to either him or Castineta. Heigh-ho—here am I in a golden uniform, expected to behave like a seasoned commander, when my wars have been only with a few rascally *shirri* and the hangman."

Whilst Serafino was lamenting thus, and there was no doubt sincerely, Cesario joined us, making a handsome figure in his tightly fitting uniform, for of dress and gaudy decorations King Theodore had brought with him an endless store.

"Look at this, Generalissimo, Count Cesario Arrighi," shouted Serafino, giving his old comrade his full title with a ring in his voice, "I am left to decipher the meaning of a crippled animal, badly drawn, with a group of ghosts hanging to it by a red string, to say nothing of signs and letterings that would confuse the mind of any professor in Corsica. What is the purpose of the gibberish, and this straining of my brains until I am as near being made mad as the eleventh son of the Emperor Jakilinitis of Morocco, when his dinner was carried off by a jackal?"



"It is an excellent plan of the proposed attack on Bastia," replied Cesario, not deigning to examine it closely, I observed. "There are full directions for our guidance, Serafino, and the plan has been made under the King's orders, by the skilfullest hands in the country."

"I'll have no more of it," exclaimed Serafino, "for already have I refused to join a merry party by reason of studying the plan, and think of what the miss of my presence means to others!"

"The way to make the plan understood," replied Cesario, "is to go over the ground ourselves, and it was to propose this that I have come here. We shall not have a better opportunity of doing so than this evening, so let us start at once. I will show you the King's method and you will agree that it is the likeliest to succeed."

"This is reason," cried Serafino, hastily fastening his sword belt, "that any plain, honest man can understand. Let me but see the place and manner of fighting, and I feel every drop of blood within me calling for my beginning the fray. Avaunt with your scribblings and plannings, and let us have a sight of the work to be done. I warrant you that the Roman Cæsars trusted to nothing but their arms and valour, and think of what those warriors have done for the world!"

"No more than you would have done had the chance been given you, Serafino," replied Cesario, "but we are wasting our time in chattering thus.



It will take an hour or longer to go through the business, therefore put the plan aside and begin something that even a duller brain than yours would understand."

Serafino tossed the paper from him and we came out of the tent into the still evening air. Right and left lay the soldiers of the besieging army, around the embers of their camp fires, a murmur of talk coming softly; and away in the distance rose the sombre shadow of Bastia. From that and the hilly ground whereon the besiegers were encamped was a stretch of country, some two miles wide, through which ran a winding path between thicket-crowned hillocks that cast blots of black shadow as the moon climbed high through the dark blue heaven. Far off gleamed a streak of silver across the silent sea, and so peaceful was the scene that the fierce passions of men which had been spent in death and blood only a few days since, and burned sullenly still unglutted, were forgotten for the time. Not a sound broke the solemn quietude as we moved cautiously from the groups of resting men, passing the watchful sentries with a whispered word, and coming at length to the outposts, whom Cesario questioned swiftly before we moved forward beyond the lines of the encampment.

"We begin from here," said Cesario, coming to a sudden halt a few moments later. "Colonel Rivarola's men will be stationed at this point, so that in the event of the enemy advancing, a flank movement as a counter....."



"For the love of Saint Crispino," exclaimed Serafino, "confuse me no further with your flanks and counters. Tell me where the fighting will be and the thickest part of it—let me know that—and your flanks and counters, your masks and ambuscades may all be left to wiser heads than mine; for only one part of a battle know I, and that is to get within reach of your opponent, so that either you or he must be quieted and the matter settled. Let me be plain Serafino the soldier rather than the General this German Theodore has made me, and I shall die with a quiet conscience, having done all that a plain, well-meaning fighting man could do."

"But there is more than that expected from you, Serafino," replied Cesario. "The men under your command speak of your bravery and skill. Let me further explain the nature of the forthcoming attack."

"Let me further explain that it is all confusion to me already," cried Serafino. "Give me plain fighting and your plans and counterplans may be left to those who made the maddening things. I would there were a chance of meeting the enemy at this moment, although there are but three of us to withstand them."

"Then I think you will have your wish, Serafino!" I exclaimed, for at the instant of his speaking I saw the black forms of some men move from the shadow of a thicket, and creep down to where across the more open country stretched the winding path white in the moonlight. Serafino was for following the



moving figures immediately, but Cesario restrained him.

"Wait an instant," said the latter. "There is some mischief afoot, by the sight of those men yonder, and we will watch their movements."

"There are two figures coming from the direction of Bastia," I exclaimed. "Spies, perhaps, and in league with the men before us."

"Follow me," replied Cesario, beginning to move forward, Serafino going next after him. and I last; in which order we went in the deep shadow of some trees until gaining a position not far from the mysterious body of men, from which we could see them indistinctly, as they stood as if awaiting the approach of the two travellers. These last were hurrying as though in haste to cover the distance between Bastia and the camp, and one of them limped in his walk, their figures casting gaunt shadows on the road. Then with a suddenness quite unexpected, the men who had remained partly concealed until now, sprang from their hiding place, and in an instant had surrounded the two men, from one of whom a piercing shriek of alarm broke the stillness. There was a confused movement, a flashing of sword blades in the moonlight, and the taller of the two men, limping backward, stood defending his life against his assailants valiantly. The other traveller had fallen to his knees, imploring mercy in tones which reached us and had a familiar sound.

We said not a word, nor was any needed, for



Serafino had rushed down the sloping ground, with Cesario close beside him, and in a moment later we were engaged in a desperate fight. Whom they might be we were defending mattered not, for it was plain that slaughter was imminent, and with a sweeping cut Serafino had sent one of the band reeling from the supplicating figure, and was fighting hand to hand with another. Bending a moment to rouse the kneeling man to lend us aid, for the odds were against us, I narrowly evaded a deadly blow from one of the infuriated men, and then there followed such a fierce battle that even Serafino owned himself satisfied with it later on. To and fro swayed the fray, and I knew that the fellow I had attempted to arouse had slipped away, screaming like a frightened woman, whilst through the wild tumult, the man who limped in his movements was fighting gallantly, Cesario aiding him, and that two of the foe lay helpless on the ground at their feet.

Then Serafino and a man his equal in height and bulk had separated from the others, and I leaped nimbly aside, escaping a thrust which would have ended my part in the fight otherwise, and it seemed as though a pause had come, for I was given time to watch the encounter between Serafino and his opponent. With a cry of rage the latter had rushed through Serafino's guard, and the two men swayed backward and forward, locked in a deadly embrace, until my companion tore himself free and went staggering a yard away with a dagger in his shoulder.



I sprang to his rescue, but quick as was my movement, Serafino had recovered himself more rapidly, and I heard his teeth grind as he renewed the fight. Like a flash of lightning his sword glittered in the moonbeams, meeting his opponent's, which splintered as though but glass, and Serafino's blade cutting downward smote his enemy upon the wrist, severing the hand as cleanly off as one might cut a melon in twain. Yet even then the disabled fellow's dauntless fury and courage were unsubdued, nay I should rather say increased, for although the spouting blood dyed his clothes black in the silvery light, he fought on, hissing out his fierce rage. "Viva Vittoli," he shouted, and there ran to his side one of his companions, whom my sword greeted, and so much strength did I put into my thrust that the blade passed through the fellow's side, and he went down in a groaning heap, dragging me with him.

When I recovered my feet, Serafino was standing spent and breathless over the prostrate body of his foe, Cesario and the traveller he had so bravely defended and saved from death, having ended the fight triumphantly. Across the open ground fled the "Vittoli", as I had discovered them to be, and a sudden silence had taken the place of trampling footsteps and fierce outcries of rage and pain.

That Serafino was badly hurt I saw at a glance, and if it had not been for my assistance he would have fallen, whilst crouching like a whipped dog at his feet was the cowardly fellow for whose sake



my companion had shed his blood. I was regarding the miserable wretch, meaning to upbraid him for his fear and timidity, when I heard Cesario give a strange cry of surprise. He had started backward from the stranger, and whilst I looked at them the moonlight fell full upon the white face of Fabiani Brasco.

"It is you whom I have saved then!" and Cesario's voice had a harsh sound in it. "Yet I shall keep *my* oath, Signor Brasco," and then a whimper came from the crouching figure, as with a shout loud enough for all his weakness Serafino recognised in the grovelling man, the notary of Corte.

"I would I had been a thousand miles off when King Theodore forced that oath upon his followers," muttered Serafino. "But now that your life has been saved, tell me what evil spirit has brought you and your friend here?"

"We have escaped from Bastia," gasped Signor Poli, "and with Signor Brasco, I am on my way to offer my services to King Theodore."



## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### FABIANI EXPLAINS.

**F**OR a moment or two the effects of the fight vanished before the conflicting emotions that seized me at this meeting with the men to whom my friends and I owed so many of our misfortunes and perils. Fabiani remained at a little distance, regarding me intently; and as if fearing to trust his own speech, Cesario turned from his old enemy to speak in a whisper with Serafino. Signor Poli drew himself to the side of his companion, and then for a little interval of silence we who had so strangely met, remained upon the scene of the encounter, midway between the sombre shadow of Bastia and the besieging army of King Theodore; but Serafino's voice suddenly roused me from my posture of surprise.

"Lend me that sound body of yours, Signor Notary," he growled, "for it is the only one which has escaped unhurt, and help me get back to my tent. To think it is for you I have fought, and saved from death you who have deserved it these ten years, is a martyrdom to me, but it has to be



borne. I have given my promise—come hither, villain—and it is a promise not to be broken—nay, have no fear, brave scribbler of deeds and mischief,—I vowed to forgive my enemies—why, you are trembling like a frightened child—and so you are forgiven; outwardly that is, for——”

“Noble champion of distress,” interrupted the notary, who had stepped forward, and upon whose shoulder Serafino was leaning heavily, “I pray you let bygones be bygones, for never yet have I thought to do you an ill service. It fills me with grief to think your helping me has brought you these dreadful wounds, yet have I a remedy for such, and never has it failed. And to you, Signor Arrighi, and the young man Negroni whom I would fain rejoice over, if your mighty weight, valiant Serafino, did not wellnigh overbear my weakness of body, which an ague, caught from a damp wig, has brought about, I vow that——”

“And I vow also,” interrupted Serafino in turn, “that I shall speedily forget my vow, and strangle thee, most honourable notary, if thy tongue does not cease wagging. Help me to get back to the camp, and keep your remedies to yourself; I am confident they would be more harmful than a dozen sword scratches!” And the two men moved slowly from us.

Fabiani limped beside me as we followed, and for a pace or two neither of us spoke. Cesario walked apart, not deigning to look at nor speak



to my kinsman, and it was thus that smarting and fatigued we went from the spot, leaving three of our enemies on the ground.

"Camilla," and Fabiana whispered hoarsely in my ear as he toiled painfully along. "I have many slanderers and foes who may have spoken untruthfully of me to you. I ask you to believe me when I say that I have done you no wrong."

"Yet you witnessed against me in Bastia," I replied. "It was you and Teodor who brought my life in danger. How can I forget that?"

"I spoke thus to save you," he answered, "and Teodor for the same purpose. Without I had done so, you and Cesario Arrighi would have been executed as spies before daybreak, but the governor, upon learning that I was acquainted with you resolved upon your being further examined. Through me, you and Arrighi escaped from your prison."

"But at the gate of Bastia you attempted our recapture," I retorted bitterly.

"It was a pretence only," he answered vehemently. "You had been discovered, and I created the confusion in order that you might the easier escape. I am glad that the chance has been given me of explaining these matters to you."

"And will Cesario believe this?" I asked.

"Bah, what matter if he doubt me," replied my cousin. "He has saved my life, and our enmity is buried. His revenge is complete."

I was in no mood to argue with him, nor to ask



further questions, but I resolved to do so when we reached the camp and had recovered from the effects of our desperate fight, that were telling their tale in each of us, except the notary who had kept aloof from the struggle. The outposts were reached and the sentries passed before Fabiani spoke again, as he looked in wonder at the lines of soldiers.

"The Genoese have scoffed at King Theodore and his army," he said, "but they would speak differently if they were with us, Camilla. I am here to offer what aid I can, by deeds and money, to this gallant king of our country," and Fabiani raised his cap as he spoke.

There was no help for it but that I should offer him the shelter of the little tent which I occupied, and this I did. Signor Poli begged for a night's covering, declaring that although Serafino had asked him to share his, the risk was too great for the notary to accept the proposal.

"There is no telling what madness may not possess the gallant Serafino presently," said Signor Poli, "and already I have been within the reach of his arm. I was enquiring for his companion, Massoni, who formerly played the tune to which I danced."

"I recollect," I answered, as the notary crouched against my tent pole. "It was when your stockings were scorched."

"It was naught but the merriment of your friends," replied he cheerfully, but I heard him growl some-



thing beside. "And I would like to shake hands with Massoni. Said the noble Serafino, 'It will be a dangerous thing to do, for Massoni is free from this oath that binds me; and so beware of him.'"

"There is a talk of Massoni coming to the camp," I answered, "when he is sufficiently recovered; so prepare yourself, Signor Poli. It will be something more than a pair of scorched legs to fear when Massoni sees you. Why do you not return to Corte?"

"I have a reason for keeping away from Corte," replied the notary crossly. "There is a person there whom I dread more than this meeting with Massoni. I can reason with him, maybe, but not His Holiness the Pope could do that with the mad woman I am speaking of. No, I shall remain in the service of my king—he will find me more useful than a regiment of ordinary men."

The time was not yet ripe for me to question him about my own affairs, and the share he had had in robbing me. I must first let Nasone know that Poli and my kinsman had come thus into my company again, and I began to look about for a way of giving Nasone the information, and for his advising me; but just at the present moment, to get a message so far as Ajaccio seemed impossible. Martin Chicheley had not returned, nor had any news come from him, although some weeks had elapsed since his leaving Cervione, and I began to despair of ever seeing his merry face again.



Fabiani and Signor Poli made themselves very comfortable in my tent, and I went to Serafino's, begging a share of his.

"I distrust the company in mine," I said; "for all the notary's politeness. It is only because he fears us that he does not rail at you and me."

"Wait until Massoni hears of this," growled Serafino, "and Signor Poli will have something to dread in earnest. The news will bring Massoni from a sick-bed even."

"But my cousin says they have come to offer the King their services, Serafino," I answered.

"Well, we shall see what the end of the affair will be," he replied. "King Theodore is coming to the camp in a few days, and perchance Fabiani and his comrade have intelligence of the greatest importance. They have been traitors to Corsica once, and I see no reason why they should not be traitors to the Genoese."

Whilst he was speaking Cesario came into the tent, looking more serious than I had ever seen him look before.

"Did your cousin say anything of his son to you, Camilla?" he asked me abruptly.

"Not a word," I answered, "and that seems a strange thing."

"He would hardly have left him in Bastia," continued Cesario. "The danger would have been too great for Teodor when his father's flight had been discovered."



"I will go now and ask after Teodor," I cried, getting up slowly, for my wounds smarted sadly, "and you shall hear what answer I get." So I went back to my little tent, to find Fabiani and the notary busily engaged over some papers which the latter thrust into his pocket at my approach. In reply to my question Fabiani's face wrinkled into a smile.

"Teodor has gone to Ajaccio," he told me. "He started a few days since, and if nothing has hindered him, he is ending some business which he had with Emanuel Matra."

"In Ajaccio!" I exclaimed surprised. "I understand now why you sent him there instead of doing the business yourself, kinsman. Nasone would not have given you a very friendly greeting."

"Bah!" exclaimed Fabiani scornfully. "I have no fear of Nasone; he is an obstinate fool, but harmless. Is it not so, Poli?"

"The young man Teodor can manage the old imbecile, as one can mould wax," answered the notary, "yet you forget, Signor Brasco, that there is another part of your son's business to be done in Ajaccio. Signor Vico, the farmer, and his daughter will welcome Teodor. The farmer has hired a little house hard by Ajaccio, and without doubt Teodor lingers there yet." And when the notary ended this speech with a giggling laugh, I felt very much inclined to flog him. There was a vague dread at my heart, of danger hovering over Martin Chicheley,



and that Signor Poli knew more than he was inclined to say. However, I left the pair in the tent, and took the news to Cesario, with whom I talked long after Serafino had fallen asleep.

"The King's return will show the true complexion of this affair," said my companion. "I trust it may turn out for his welfare, for already there are rumours of disloyalty amongst Theodore's followers, and some of them have fallen away from their vows to him."

"What does this going of Teodor to Ajaccio mean?" I asked presently.

"Time will prove," answered Cesario, with a glance in the direction of my tent which hid his mortal foe from sight, and then we followed Serafino's example and were soon asleep.



## CHAPTER XXXIV.

### A MYSTERIOUS SUMMONS.

**I**N due time the King rejoined his army, riding into camp at the head of a gay cavalcade, and more finely dressed than usual. Giafferi, Paoli, and another gentleman named Luca Ornano, were beside him, and Theodore riding up before the soldiers who stood at the salute, made a speech full of spirit and hope. The sun glittered on the arms that he had brought with him in the ship, and never before had braver men handled gun or sword than those who raised a ringing cheer as King Theodore, fresh from his visit to the interior of the island, rode down the ranks of his army. The gentleman whom I have named Luca Ornano, had received the monarch with an embassy of the principal men in that part of Corsica, by whom Theodore had been led in triumph to a town called Sartene, and there an order of knighthood had been founded by the king. They were all knights of a day's growth, it may be said, who rode with Theodore, and a dozen more of his chief men were to receive the honour.

When Theodore had retired to his quarters I



ventured to him, and maybe because it was that I never begged a favour, nor asked for a gift, he always seemed pleased to receive me. He appeared to step down from the height he occupied in the presence of his courtiers and councillors and became the plain man he was in reality, one beset moreover by a thousand troubles and dangers, which were never far from him, King though he was.

"There have come two men into the camp from Bastia," I told him, after he had asked some trivial questions. "One of them is a kinsman of mine, and the other a notary named Poli, from Corte. There are men better fitted to be trusted than they."

"Corte!" repeated Theodore reflectively, as he stood holding his chin between his finger and thumb. "We had a mad woman petition us when the court passed through Corte. It was that we should deliver a certain man, named Poli, into her hands, and being minded to favour our subjects in even such a trifling affair as this, we told the mad woman to follow us to Cervione, and if this master of hers were to be found, against whom she has a grievance it seems, he should then and there be called to give an account of himself. This Poli then is the very creature?"

"The same man, Sire," I answered, and King Theodore gave a little laugh.

"I am inclined to pity the fellow," he said, "but there are other things beside these to be considered just now. We hold a court to-morrow, and those who have served their country and king so bravely



are to be rewarded. There are to be twelve knight-hoods conferred, and these are to be freely bestowed. Others who have received the honour paid each a hundred scudi. We doubt whether such a sum could be raised though the twelve new knights made one amount of their monies."

I doubted too, for Cesario had told me only that day of the dire poverty which existed in the army, and how difficult it was for anyone to buy even the most trifling luxury. However, I kept silence about this, and the King went on talking in a weary manner of what he hoped might be the result of his struggle in the cause of his kingdom. I can see him now, divested of his gorgeous trappings, lying back on the straw mattress which was on the ground in his tent, having nothing kingly about him, except his pompous talk and the commanding tone he used. And I have cause to recollect that occasion, for it was the last upon which King Theodore and I were to speak to each other for a long time, being, moreover, the eve of greater dangers and troubles to myself than I had yet encountered.

The next day the King in the midst of his army conferred the honour of knighthood upon his faithful followers. Twelve of these were drawn up apart from the gathering of the others and with King Theodore were those who had come to the camp in his train. I watched these men very closely, and for all their homage to him, there was an air of discontent in their faces, and a gloomy dissatis-



faction prevailed. Not, however, amongst the simple-hearted fellows who were proud of being singled out thus for distinction, amongst whom was Serafino, who stood first of the group, with a bandage here and there upon him where he had been wounded in the fray with the "Vittoli." The sun shone brightly, flags waved in the gentle breeze, the ranks of soldiers spread on either side of the big square into which the army had been mustered, and a chair covered with a scarlet cloth stood ready for the King, who came out from his ragged tent at the head of his courtiers presently. King Theodore wore his laurel crown, and held his sceptre royally: his tinselled robe swept the grass and his costume was more beautiful than I have power to describe; but he was ill at ease in spite of all this magnificence. There had been a council held that morning, and a troublesome matter discussed, so Cesario told me, and that the King was to make a speech to his subjects thereon, after the ceremony of knighting had been gone through.

There were so many incidents connected with that memorable morning when King Theodore of Corsica bestowed honours thus broadcast on simple soldiers, who hitherto had been nothing greater than tillers of the soil, shepherds, and as in the case of Serafino those who had been banned by the law and driven to seek their living amongst the mountains, and were it not that I have events more intimately associated with myself to set down, I would describe



the ceremony at greater length than I do here. Suffice it to say then, that the first to be knighted was Serafino, who went limping up to the seat, where the King received him with a longer speech than was to Serafino's liking; but it ended at last, and if the newly made knight had not stumbled in rising from his knees—being wounded as it may be remembered—and in saving himself clutched at the dwarfish drummer who was never far off from His Majesty, the ceremony would have wanted nothing to complete its solemnity. As it was, however, Serafino, "Knight of the Golden Cross," as the order was called, and the elf-like drummer rolled over in the dust together, and those who stood around the King laughed for the first and only time that day.

"A pest on the noisy little imp!" shouted Serafino, getting up with the aid of a friend. "He is for ever in the way, and I am minded to fasten him inside his own goatskin drum out of sight for his interference with me."

The drummer was as angry as he, however, abusing him roundly, but being no more than the weight of a feather, Serafina tossed him amongst the crowd, drum and all, and there we heard his squeaking voice until somebody silenced it, for the King had begun his speech to us.

"There are," said he, in a voice that all could hear, "those of our faithful subjects whose trials and labours in our cause are ever in our recollection.



It is to them and to you that we speak words of hope and confidence, and to the few who are disaffected, if they be here this day, that your loyalty to us may be increased and their doubts and disaffection removed. A fleet of ships, bearing stores and all manner of arms, ammunition, foods, and necessities, will reach Corsica before the end of October, and upon our kingly word, before you all, we promise to resign our crown and kingdom, if this fleet fail in so appearing. It is for you to depose us from our throne, whilst it is for your King to ceaselessly maintain the rights and privileges of every Corsican, and in this fashion we leave the issues to Providence."

He raised himself to his full height, giving a wide sweep with his sceptre in the air, and a cheer arose from every throat in the ranks of the brave army.

Cesario who stood at my side whispered in my ear.

"One would never guess the danger that the King is in," he said, "nor that the revolt against him is growing every hour. He is surrounded by enemies, and this kingdom of his is not more real than the mirage. Look, Camilla—your cousin Fabiani is bowing before the King, and the notary is behind his fellow-rogue."

I glanced swiftly, seeing my cousin bending respectfully in front of His Majesty, to whom he had been brought by one of the royal chamberlains, and the sight angered me. However, I resolved to profit by Fabiani's coming to the Court, for the



King should know of his wrong-doings toward me and give me justice, even though I did not regain my inheritance thereby.

There was to be a feast that evening, and to this I had received an invitation from the King himself, and I remember the look of friendliness and trust with which he spoke. "You are one," said he, "in whom I see a friend, Camilla Negroni. I cannot say that of every man. It is you who will ever do me service, and the time may come when this trust in you will be tested." He little foresaw how and when I should prove the meaning of those words of his, nor did I, but the time came in due course. And I observed how upon that single occasion it was that the King spoke of himself as "I" and not as "We", as he did usually, as became a royal personage.

What Fabiani said at this introduction to the King, or afterwards, I do not know, but His Majesty cast a searching look upon me as my cousin spoke, and the notary turned his eyes heavenward in his hateful fashion. Soon after this the gathering dispersed, and I went with Serafino to his tent, where I remained some little time. There was nothing to do, and I loitered aimlessly through the camp after leaving Serafino, thinking over a thousand things, and so wiling the hours away before I should attend to the King, which it would be my duty to do presently.

It was as I turned in the direction of the camp,



having strolled from it a little distance, that a letter was brought me by one of the soldiers by whom I was known, and who said that the letter had come by the hand of a peasant. I opened it hastily and read it.

“If you would recover your inheritance and defeat the plot of your enemies, join me without delay at the house of Costini the herdsman, which is between Corte and Cervione, a half day’s journey from the camp. Let none know of your coming.” And the letter was signed: “Emanuel Matra.”



## CHAPTER XXXV.

### SNARED!

I READ the letter twice over, trying vainly to fathom its full meaning, two things only appearing plain to me, namely that Nasone had found means of doing me a very great service, and that he had chosen to meet me away from all chance of our being interfered with by Fabiani or his agents. Placing the letter in my pocket I hastened in search of Cesario, to whom in spite of Nasone's directions to maintain secrecy I would show the letter; but although I looked everywhere for my companion, he was not to be found. The recollection of my having to attend at the King's banquet had fled from my mind, and only the thought that already Nasone might be eagerly awaiting my going to him remained. The evening shadows were beginning to gather, and each moment seemed of the greatest importance to me; I remembered no longer my purpose of questioning Fabiani and Signor Poli, but hastened back to my tent, where throwing on a cloak to shield me from the night dew, and arming myself with a sword and stiletto, I quitted



the camp. I would have spoken to Serafino, but he, like Cesario, seemed to have vanished; and pausing only to leave a hastily written word or two on a morsel of paper which I found half trodden in the grass, stating that I had gone to the house of Costini the swineherd, whom they might know or not (I considered not an instant over that), I passed with a rapid step beyond the limits of the encampment, and was soon alone amidst the solemn quietude of the countryside. To see Nasone; to learn the news he must certainly have for me, to gather evidence against my cousin, and regain my patrimony, were the only thoughts in my mind as I climbed a steep ascent, and descending the other side of this, the sight of King Theodore's army was hidden, and I was alone.

The country through which I was passing had a familiar look for all that it was my first journey into that part of it. The road leading to Corte, or at least to one which did, wound in and out between the hills, easily to be traced, and afar off like a beacon rose the glowing white summit of Monte Rotondo, which appeared almost close by, although I judged it to be a dozen miles distant or further. Not a fear nor doubt had I of missing my road, and with a blither heart than I had carried for many a day I walked steadily onward, wishing only that Martin Chicheley were with me. That thought rather dulled my high spirits, for try as I might, the fear of harm having happened to him, was growing into certainty almost.



Darker and darker grew the night, shutting out the view on either side of me, yet leaving still the glowing mountain tops in full daylight; but these by swift degrees—the lower ones first disappearing, as lights upon the altar of a church are extinguished—faded in the gathering gloom. The night breeze moaned as though aroused to sullenness after the rest of the burning day, and the chilling mist came rolling through the valley to which I had come. The thickets and clustering trees took forbidding shapes, and not a sound save the hum of the wind broke the silence; and not until I had gained midway through the valley was it that I heard a curious rustling, which caused me to start and listen. Then came the soft tread of footsteps, and a pebble, loosened by being trodden upon, rolled with a trickling noise down the slope of the hill, whereupon I sprang aside into the black shadow of a tree, waiting with my hand on my sword hilt, for whatever might be about to happen.

Suddenly a flash of light leaped out from a thicket upon the side of the road opposite to me, and some half dozen men, clad in coats of skin and armed with gun and sword, came in view. Villainous looking fellows they were too, with their shaggy locks matted together, giving their faces a more ferocious look than is possible to describe. In the sheen of light I saw their eyes glitter as the men came down on to the road, and then one of them spoke.



"One ought to come up with the lad hereabouts," he said. "Say that he left the camp at the hour named, he should be close here by now," and holding the lantern above his head he peered carefully along the road I had just traversed.

"Maybe he has walked too quickly," said another of the fellows, "and we have missed him."

"It is not a likely thing," replied the first speaker, with an angry ejaculation, and the sharp stretch of light from the lantern was turned so that it fell upon the grassy bank not a yard away from where I crouched in the shadow of the trees. Slowly the light travelled toward me, and then was full on my face, blinding me for an instant, in which a scream of mocking laughter rang out from the ruffianly band, whilst before I could offer the slightest resistance two of the men had thrown themselves upon me, pinioning my arms.

"So the bird is finely snared at last," croaked one of those who remained in the road. "A goodly business this—worth how much did you say, *Diavolo mio*? The share is how much a-piece?"

"Keep your senseless tongue quiet," growled the leader of the band. "Wait until the work is finished before asking the price for it."

"The work would be sconer ended, and easier," replied the ruffian who had asked the question, "if the youngster were quieted with a dagger thrust." And when I heard him speak thus, either the anger I felt or the fear that his advice might be followed.





Back to the tree I stood with my sword at guard.

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compelled me to give such a vigorous wrench that I freed myself from the grasp of the two ruffians, and back to the tree I stood, with my sword at guard.

A savage oath escaped the leader of the band, who springing forward, let drop the lantern, and I felt the point of my sword sink deeply into the thick flesh of his thigh. And then in the darkness I cut and thrust at my enemies, hearing their blades clanging around and over me against the tree stem, and feeling hot breath in my face as one of the fellows grappled my throat, choking the power of further fighting out of me. I was thrown like a log to the earth, and in a moment or two bound too securely for them to fear more harm from my struggles, and I heard a word of command given. Lifting my helpless body, with no more heed than if it had been a dead sheep's, the band began moving quickly, and the lantern having been relighted it enabled me to see the leader of the ruffians binding up his wounded leg as he hobbled along, and that sight was the only recompense I had for the rough usage I had been subjected to.

I was carried thus for a mile or more, my bearers being changed once or twice, each time with angry curses upon me, for the trouble I had given, and then at last I began to recognise the road by which we travelled. I cannot quite explain how I did this, but now and again the sight of the hillside, or the clustering of trees, seen dimly in the faint light of the moon, came as though it were a sight I had



seen previously. The road was rising, and as we came out from the gloom of an olive ground, the scene became more familiar than before, and catching a glimpse of the steep ascent I saw beyond it the black mass of a square building, gaunt and lonely in the moonbeams. Then the white of a steep flight of steps, and with a cry of despair I recognised my cousin Fabiani Brasco's deserted house standing before us. Not a light showed through its dismal upper windows, and the mattress shutters of the lower ones were as I recollected seeing them last. Not a sound disturbed the stillness that reigned, except the grinding footsteps of my captors upon the rough path; and without a word the leader of the band went heavily up the stairway, opening the house door, and after him came the other ruffians, who carried me into the flagged passage where I was allowed to stand on my feet once again. Then the door was shut and bolted, and the leader, frowning horribly at me from under his shaggy brows, ordered me to ascend to the uppermost room in the house.

"It would be more to my liking were I to spit you like a fowl," he hissed out. "My leg smarts as though a hot knife were searing it. But it is not to be yet, this revenge of mine, although it will come."

"What reason have you for bringing me here?" I demanded, facing him angrily.

"The best of reasons, young crower," he grinned.



"but not to be told you. Time enough to learn the reasons will be given you, so rest you content, and get to the room, else I shall be tempted to end your talk."

I was minded to continue it, however, but at a signal some of the band hustled me from the passage, forcing me up the well remembered stairs until I was thrust into a room that Fabiani had used for his sleeping place. It was empty of furniture now, however, and the window had been covered by a stout piece of timber, barred and bolted into the wall, so that it would have defied a stronger force than mine to remove the covering.

There I was left, in darkness, the door strongly fastened upon me so as to be impossible for my opening it, and for long dreary hours I heard the sounds of movements and the words of singing coming faintly from below. Sleep I could not, for my brain was on fire with mingled anger and foreboding, together with vain imaginings as to what fresh crimes my kinsman Fabiani Brasco might have in store against me.



## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### MY COUSIN'S VILLAINY.

**I** SUPPOSE sleep overcame me, for I remember seeing a streak of light creep through a chink in the window cover presently, and knew that another day had dawned. I was parched with thirst, and the close air of the room hardly allowed me to draw breath, whilst the fierce anger against Fabiani Brasco burned within me like fire. The light was not sufficient for me to see clearly the place in which I was a prisoner, and I sat considering the situation to which I had been brought. That evil was intended against me, force and violence used again, and that my cousin would not shrink from murdering me, I felt assured. But these thoughts availed only to increase the torment I was in, and getting to my feet I tried once more, as I had tried last night, to burst open the barred door. Yet though I bruised and cut my hands in the attempt, it was fruitless, and after a time the vain effort was relinquished.

Then I began watching the streak of light, as it travelled like a pointing rod of gold from one side



of the room to the other, very slowly, the moats dancing in it, giving me an interest that was but another trial of my patience. To and fro moved the atoms, and in the perfect silence that prevailed, it seemed to me as though they hummed a familiar air which I had heard long ago, although when I listened, straining my ear to catch the rhythm of it, nothing but the dead silence returned, and with it the torturing thirst.

Inch by inch, now tripping as it were over a bending of the panelled wall, and then evenly where the woodwork was smooth, went the yellow beam, until when I was lulled into indifference by watching it, the sunlight appeared to pause, sinking into a narrow slit in the wall. Only for a moment or two, however, for the bright rays moved on, coming again to another slit, and the thought flashed through me that the marks were those of another opening from the room. In a moment I had reached the wall, passing my hand over its surface, and my fingers traced the marks shown by the shaft of light, up and down, and across, finding a square space, a foot or more in height and width, forming a door. With a sudden rising of hope within me I had my grasp on this and before another minute, wrenched it open. There was a space beyond in which I could distinguish nothing, but the opening was large enough for me to thrust my head and arm through, my hand searching the direction in which the opening might lead. Alas, it was nothing but a shallow



receptacle, forming a cunningly devised cupboard; and I struggled free from it, but as I did this my hand touched a small bundle of papers. This I drew out and allowing the thin stream of light to fall on it, read the name of "Camilla Negroni" whilst above in smaller letters was my father's name. I thrust the bundle into my breast hastily, for there was the sound of the bolts and lock on my prison door being unfastened, and stepping to the further end of the room I waited defenceless against whoever might be my mortal foe. Then the door was opened, letting in daylight, and I saw the thin white face of Signor Poli. He remained, eyeing me thoughtfully for a moment, and then beckoned with a curious movement of his head.

"I have come on the most peaceful errand ever heard," he began, trying to speak as though at his ease, "and there is no need for the use of sword, firearms, or stiletto. You have been instructed in the use of weapons, therefore I wish to disarm you with fair words."

"I have no weapons," I answered. "You are safe, but before we begin talking let me get out of this horrible room. Why have I been taken prisoner?"

I suppose I spoke roughly, for he skipped back to the doorway and gave a hasty look outside it.

"You have been preserved from a greater hardship, my good youth," replied the notary, "by being brought here. It was your worthy cousin's plan,



believe me, and it is he who has sent me hither as an ambassador, as one might call me, with proposals for an honourable peace."

"I guessed the first part of your speech," I answered bitterly, "but what business you can have with me I know not."

"Peace," replied Signor Poli. "Keep that word in your mind, although I have known but little of its meaning myself since employing the services of the fiercest woman in Corsica to keep my house in Corte. And now let us put down in order the chief items of this business of mine, which are, firstly, to release you from bondage. Secondly to do my good friend Signor Fabiani Brasco a great service; thirdly to procure a favour from you, and finally, the success of the foregoing assured, to save your life, Camilla Negroni."

He stood, checking his chief items off on the tips of his fingers, and nodding at me each time he did this; and I made a rush for the door, thrusting him aside. I had reached the opening, when I was suddenly brought to bay by the sight of two of the armed ruffians by whom I had been captured overnight. Signor Poli, watching with his head round the doorpost, gave a gentle laugh in my dismayed face, and I saw that escape was hopeless.

"It will be so much pleasanter for you if we discuss the business quietly," he said. "I have a most cheering message from your cousin to you."

"He might have chosen a braver man than you



to bring it," I answered. "But you will serve to carry one from me to him. Say that I have discovered his villainy and how cruelly he has wronged me."

"Signor Brasco would resent such a message," cried the notary, "and we waste time in talking thus. Yet allowing that he has done all this, and the law requires proof, also that it was by his order that you have been brought here—but this I would argue with any lawyer in Corsica as to the truth of it—he has also sent me here to give you freedom. And that by your own action, which is to sign a docket, the which to do more readily I have brought ink, pen, and sand, knowing the dearth of such things in this ghost-haunted house, which it will delight me to quit so soon as you have placed your sign manual—so the words go—upon this same, docket agreement, testament or indenture—as it may please you to call it."

"And if I refuse to sign the writing?" I asked, whereat Signor Poli shrugged his shoulders.

"It is very lonely here, none know of your being in the house, there are none to enquire the reason for your disappearance—the times are dangerous and men vanish from sight every day, and such will be your case, my young friend," he answered. "In a word, that I would only whisper, you will be a dead man within a day of my leaving you, unless you sign the paper. That is a clear statement—clear as the writing on a parchment. Think of it!"



"Fabiani will cause me to be murdered, you mean, Signor Poli?" and he shrugged his shoulders again, yet not answering me this time.

"That was his purpose in sending a letter signed by Emanuel Matra to me," I cried, longing to seize the notary by the throat, for he had laughed in my face the second time.

"He is a shrewd man," he replied, "and the letter appears to have had a good result. But come—tell me whether you will place your hand to this"—and he held out a folded paper.

What the purpose of obtaining my signature might have been, and what need there was for my cousin to force it from me, I did not pause to ask. My anger seemed to drive every other thought from my mind as I saw the notary's evil look watching me and his hand holding out the paper. With a sudden bound I was upon him, and although he divined my intent and evaded it I succeeded in grasping his coat, the bow of his wigtail being in my hand too, and with a screech of alarm Signor Poli had escaped, leaving his wig and a fragment of coat in my clutch. The door was thrown to and securely bolted, and with the fading gleam of light I was alone again. I heard a laugh and the hasty movement of footsteps, but these vanished quickly, and the heavy silence was over me once more.

How I passed the night I cannot say, but somehow sleep overcame me, and the light shot in upon the second morning of my imprisonment, and with



it I heard footsteps approaching the room. Then the door was flung open and the fellow who had commanded the band came in, having a knife in his hand.

"Short work is best with you," he growled, "and there is more to be done than keeping guard here, so the order given me shall be executed forthwith." And as he said this with a fiendish glare in his eyes, the ruffian moved toward me, as I retreated to a corner. Another instant and I doubt not but his knife would have done its work, but as he advanced I saw a faint chance of escape. He was close to me, holding out one strong hand to grasp my clothes, and holding the knife in the other, ready to strike the fatal blow, when I rushed forward, striking him in the face, whilst as he recoiled I had reached the door, and running for my life, was down the staircase before he could recover his voice, to yell after me.

The house door stood ajar, and the fresh air came blowing in through it; I was on the topmost step of the steep flight of stairs, free at last, and then I felt a grasp on my arm. I gave one look round to see the hairy face of another of my jailors, and then I and he were rolling down the steps together.

It had all happened so quickly that I can tell no more of the manner in which I escaped than by this brief description; but I seemed to come to my senses as I lay a moment with a sharp pain in my shoulder, and the man who had fallen also, kneeling over



me, spluttering out an angry word or two, with the blood streaming from a cut in his forehead. At the top of the steps was the man who had been in the room, and he came hobbling down the stairs, brandishing his knife. I tried to rise, but the ruffian kneeling at my side, held me down—the hobbling man had reached to within a yard of us, and then it was that clear out on the air, like a trumpet note came the shout, “Camilla, annoy!” and it was Martin Chicheley’s voice I heard.



## CHAPTER XXXVII.

### MARTIN'S STORY.

“**C**AMILLA, ahoy!” it was the shout I had heard Martin give many a time, and hearing it now put such new life and strength into me, that I struggled free from the fellow who was holding me, and was on my feet the next moment. I heard someone running, and Martin passed me like a flash, meeting my would-be murderer ere the miscreant could reach the foot of the steps. Then it was all confusion for a few moments, during which I was fighting for life, my bare hands opposed to my antagonist's stiletto.

I suppose it was nothing but my despair which gave me advantage over him, for I had my grip in the neck of his goatskin coat, and sent his weapon flying. But so strong was he, that although I kept my hold at his throat, and so tightly that his bloodshot eyes were starting from their sockets, I could not throw him from me. And then he had released himself, catching me in his arms that pinioned mine, lifting me from my feet. I guessed his purpose, which was to hurl me down the sloping rocks, and



that meant certain death—nothing could save me, and I gave a despairing cry. Martin and his antagonist were struggling at a little distance from me, neither gaining the victory, but as I was forced to the edge of the descent, there was the sound of a heavily falling body.

Not six yards separated me from that awful fall, down through tangled boughs and jutting rocks, and I felt my foe exerting his great strength to its utmost, his breath coming harshly in his effort to throw me down; and inch by inch I fought for life. Three yards now and a wild dread robbed me of my little remaining power of resistance—nearer and nearer came the fatal edge, and as I closed my eyes to hide them from the horrid depth, a pistol-shot hissed by my ear, the grip round me suddenly fell away, and with the hot blood of my foe splashed on my face I reeled away from the descent—saved.

Martin was at my side, breathless and eager, and in a moment I had recovered myself.

“I was in the very nick of time,” he cried, “for they intended to murder you, Camilla. How has it all come about?”

“You shall hear presently,” I answered, hardly able to get the words from my parched lips. “Where is the man who was descending the steps?”

“There,” answered Martin, pointing to where the ruffian lay motionless, “but whether he is dead or no I care not, seeing he is quiet.” And then I glanced round for the other man, but he was no-



where to be seen. I guessed, however, that he had fallen down the descent, and there we were glad enough to leave him.

“Let us get from this awful spot!” I exclaimed. “There may be others of the band close at hand.” And we hurried away, too eager to be gone for more words to be spoken by either of us just then. Martin had bound his hand with his neckcloth and carried it within his breast, but it was no time to enquire of his hurt. It was not until some days later that I heard the history of his encounter with the murderous fellow on the steps, but that it had been a fierce fight I was certain. Whether his antagonist had been left alive we never discovered, nor did we in truth care to enquire, for the world was well rid of the fellow if he were dead. All I knew as we hastened from the scene of my escape was that Martin’s pistol shot had saved me from death, and a gratitude not to be expressed by words filled me.

Before Martin would tell me his own adventures, I had to relate mine, to which he listened as we sat in a cottager’s hut, with a flagon of wine and some food between us. When my story was ended Martin gave me a curious look and a smile was in his brown eyes.

“There is more to be said regarding your cousin Signor Fabiani Brasco, but it is not for you to say it,” he laughed. “And for my own part, there is another of your loving kinsmen, Camilla, with



whom I have an account to settle. Teodor Brasco and I have not seen the last of each other yet."

"You have met Teodor?" I exclaimed in surprise. "Where did you do so, Martin?"

"At the house of Signor Vico," replied my companion, suddenly losing his gaiety. "But let us begin at the right end of the tale, which starts from the time when I was sent by King Theodore into Ajaccio, where I did what I could in his service; and if it was not the best news I had to give him, there was no better to be gathered.

"You may readily understand," continued Martin," that when the chance of going to Ajaccio was offered me I was only too pleased to accept it. Signor Vico had already moved from his farm and was living in a little house close by the town. That I had heard from a source I need not stop to explain, however, but it was the happiest piece of news ever told me since I got left behind by the ship in Corsica.

"I found Signor Vico's house without much trouble, and received the warmest welcome from him and Dame Ursulo, but I was sorry to find him very ill. A ghoulis doctor from Ajaccio was bending over the bed, and looking as grave as if poor Signor Vico were dead already. I know not what ailed the sick man, and do what I could it was impossible to comfort Dame Ursulo and Lucia. It nearly broke my heart to see Lucia weeping, and when I learnt from her that your rascally cousin



was minded to put her grandfather into prison for a paltry debt the poor fellow could not pay him forthwith, you can guess what my feelings were.

"It was after the day when I gathered what news was to be got for King Theodore—and I did this by making friends with the doctor I told you about just now, who took me under his wing into Ajaccio—that upon my returning to Signor Vico's house, I found Teodor Brasco there. I guessed he had another reason for his visit than mere money-getting—Lucia's eyes told me that—and I took the young gentleman aside."

I bent forward, watching Martin's face as he spoke, wondering how he could speak so coldly of the affair; but I remembered that it was his natural way, and that his quietest words had a fuller meaning than the fiery speeches of a Corsican. "What did you say to Teodor?" I asked.

"Not very much," replied Martin carelessly. "But he understood it. Said I, 'Your presence is not needed here, Signor Brasco, and moreover not to be endured. It will be better if you go quietly, as my throwing you out of the window may disturb the sick man who lies in the next room.'

"Dame Ursulo was present when I said this, and she gave me a look of gratitude which assured me Signor Teodor was no favourite of hers. Lucia was with her grandfather, and the end of that part of the story is that the fellow went off.

"I will make you answer me for this insult,'



said he—"the opportunity will come," and he departed, scowling like an angry dog.

"Dame Ursulo told me something after he had gone, which made me regret not having run my sword through his body, for it seems Signor Teodor had made an offer that if Lucia would consent to marry him, he would pay her grandfather's debt himself."

Martin's face had become suddenly crimsoned as he told me this, and it needed no more to make the reason plain why he had threatened to throw Teodor out of the window, but I said nothing, and after a little pause he continued.

"On the last visit I paid to Nasone," he said, "he told me that his affairs had all been settled, his household goods sold, and that his intention was to quit Ajaccio. I suppose that affair with the tax-gatherer was at the bottom of Nasone's resolution, but be that as it may, he has left the town."

"What of that same tax-gatherer?" I enquired. "Did you encounter him during your visits to Ajaccio?"

"Having the best reason for keeping out of his way," answered Martin, "I never went round a corner nor crossed a street, without throwing out an advance-guard of watchful looks. To have met Signor Rota would have meant to endanger the happiness of others beside my own, for that he would have clapped me into a prison goes without saying, had he caught me. But as it is I have escaped him."



"And now tell me what has happened after your last visit to Nasone," I asked. "I had given up all hope of ever seeing you again, Martin. You have been away so long that I feared some harm had come to you."

"Would you have had me leave our friend Signor Vico in his illness?" demanded Martin, scarlet again; "or before I had assured myself that no harm should happen to Lucia? I'll tell you a secret, Camilla."

"There is no need for that," I laughed. "I have guessed it already, but go on from your parting with Nasone."

"Well, then, the time came when my conscience began to smite me in that I had not returned with my message to King Theodore," went on Martin, "and with a heavy heart I left Lucia—that is, I mean, the house where Signor Vico lay dying. It had to come, that parting from my friends, and I set off upon my return to the camp which I reached without being hindered by anybody. My first duty, after having had an interview with his Majesty, was to find you, and that I failed to do. Serafino showed me a piece of paper which he had found in your tent, and as he was not able to leave the camp, I set out alone on my search."

"And did you find the cottage of Costini?" I asked eagerly, doubting very much whether such a place ever existed.

"I found the ruins of it," replied Martin. "A



crazied old woman who was hovering near the spot, told me the story of how the " Vittoli " had burnt Costini's house over his head, and that he had fled none knew whither. With this a dreadful misgiving seized me that you had met with a mishap yourself, Camilla, and for a time I wandered aimlessly in the hope of finding you. Chance brought me within sight of that desolate house, which you had told me was your old home, and I resolved to search there for you. To give warning of my approach I hailed, seagoing fashion, and from what happened I think my appearance anywhere was never luckier than at that moment." And Martin ended his story with a dancing look of gratification in his eyes.

" And now for the camp, Martin," I cried, starting from my seat, the resolution to obtain justice for myself and the punishment Fabiani Brasco so richly merited, dealt out to us by the King, making me forget everything else for the moment. But as I got up, the package of writings that until then I had also forgotten, made itself remembered by catching in the corner of the table. I drew them from the breast of my coat, opening the one which bore my father's and my own name on it. It was my father's will, that Fabiani Brasco had stolen from Nasone, and I gave a shout of rejoicing. I can only explain as the reason for my discovery of the papers, that in the distracted condition of the island my cousin had no safer place wherein to secrete his plunder, than the receptacle in his house which



I had so strangely discovered. However, be that as it may, I had the precious document safely now, nor should it ever leave my hands except to go to those equally trustworthy. But there, upon the cracked top of the cottager's table we spread the papers open, and I read the list of my father's estate. Money, land, and houses were mine if I could but win justice, and I remember Martin clapping me on the shoulder, vowing that I was rich enough to live at my ease when I had got with him to England.

"For," cried he, "I am set on getting home to Staffordshire when the chance comes of quitting Corsica, and you, Camilla, are going with me."

"But you refused to leave when there was a chance of so doing, Martin," I replied.

"True enough," he laughed, "I had a strong reason for remaining here then, but I have a stronger one for going away now. But you shall know what that reason of mine is presently, Camilla, and if we are ever to reach King Theodore's army again, let us set off at once."

I was as eager as he to start, and in a very short time we were well on our way, with the gloomy house from which I had escaped, and was never again to see, turning blacker and more desolate than it ever looked, far behind us amid the eternal silence of the mountains.



## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

### A CORSICAN'S REVENGE.

**W**E reached the camp before sunset, and passing quietly through the lines of soldiers, Martin and I came to the ragged tent where Serafino welcomed us with a shout of joy that echoed again.

"They said you had turned traitor, Camilla," he cried, "and deserted King Theodore; but I denied that with an answer the fellow who told me the story will not soon forget. Ay, and I have been to the King himself no later than an hour ago with a prophecy that you would return to his service. Cesario, too, was firm in his belief in your honour."

"Then how did the rumour begin?" I asked.

"It came from that evil-hearted kinsman of yours, Camilla," exclaimed Serafino, "who vowed you were a renegade. It was well for you that I was not present when he spread such a report of you, or I would have asked proof from him, with an inch or so of cold steel."

"I have an account to settle with Fabiani Brasco," I answered, "beyond his evil reports of me," and



with this I told the story of my cousin's house.

"And now tell me, Serafino," I continued, "where are Fabiani and his fellow-villain to be found?"

"Ask the mountains, amongst which they have disappeared," he replied, "for that long-shanked notary and Fabiani Brasco were seen slinking like a pair of foxes from the camp, some hours since."

"In what direction did they go?" asked Martin in his quiet manner. "Because I also have a matter to settle with Signor Brasco."

"In the direction of Corte they went, or at least that is what I suppose," answered Serafino. "But Cesario will tell you more perhaps."

From Serafino we went to Cesario's quarters, and there a great surprise greeted us, for pacing to and fro was Nasone. Cesario was with his Majesty, he told us when we had shaken hands and I had recovered from my astonishment at seeing him.

"I have left Ajaccio for ever," explained Nasone, "but doubtless Martin has told you that I have other business on hand now."

I did not enquire what this might be, for I was too full of my story of the plot against me, devised by Fabiani Brasco, to pay much heed to anything else just then, and to this Nasone listened with a frown on his face.

"It was to meet Fabiani that I journeyed to the King's camp," he said, "but my enemy has escaped me. To Corte, do you say he is gone, Camilla?"

"So Serafino believes," I replied.



"Then to Corte will I follow him," cried Nasone; and we three agreed to travel thither in company so soon as I had explained the cause and result of my leaving the camp to King Theodore.

This I next proceeded to do, finding the King in a sadder condition of mind than I had ever seen him in yet. For there were great troubles looming in the distance, he told me, speaking unreservedly as though I were one of his most trusted friends.

"A party has been formed against me," he said bitterly, "organised under the name of 'Indifferents'; and all who are dissatisfied with the rewards I have bestowed, and who look to me to work greater miracles than are possible to be performed by a mortal man, have joined this party. Hyacinthus Paoli has gone from his allegiance and with him are Aitelli and Raffaeli—men whom I have ennobled. Already the royal troops have encountered these malcontents and their armed followers, and suffered defeat," and the poor King turned his troubled face aside from me.

"Though I have promised my subjects that a fleet is nigh at hand, with re-inforcements and supplies, the disaffection is spreading. Think then, Camilla Negroni, how the news that you had proved a traitor to my cause, pained me. I learnt this from Signor Fabiani Brasco your kinsman, by whom I was assured of never seeing you again."

"Because it was Fabiani Brasco's purpose to murder me, Sire," I cried, and then whilst King



Theodore listened patiently I told him the story of my cousin's crimes.

"You shall have justice done you," exclaimed the king, ruddy with indignation, "and that speedily. I will order this rascally fellow to relinquish his grasp on your property, Camilla Negroni, and see moreover that you lose not a *scudi* of it."

"I am here to ask permission to follow Fabiani to Corte, your Majesty," I answered. "Martin Chicheley and one Emanuel Matra will go with me."

"The sooner this villain Brasco is brought to justice the better," exclaimed the King, "and my royal word is pledged that your inheritance shall be restored to you."

With this I showed him the papers and my father's will, which I had found hidden in Fabiani's house, and having again received the King's assurance of helping me I quitted his presence. Before daylight had broken Nasone, Martin Chicheley, and I started for Corte, with an order from King Theodore commanding the immediate appearance of Fabiani Brasco and Signor Poli before him, to answer for their wrong-doings, Serafino seeing us some part of the way on our road.

"You may perchance light upon Massoni," he said as we parted. "And if you have aught to wring from the notary, do so before Massoni gets within touch of the rascal, for there will be no further speeches from the fellow otherwise."

We promised to be circumspect in the conduct



of our business, and with a word of hope, Serafino left to go back to the camp, we stepping out briskly on our errand which neither of us could guess the end of clearly.

On the way I questioned Nasone, as to the reason my cousin might have had in forcing me to sign the paper which the notary had brought, and what the consequences would have been, if I had done this.

"We will find that out from Signor Poli," said Nasone, with a stern glance before him. "He is a more cunning rogue than I can fathom, but there is a dire punishment in store for him. Yet before that falls on his head, you must compel him to unburden the secrets concerning yourself, Camilla. He knows the full account of your inheritance and the way by which you can recover it. Fail not to remember what I have said about Signor Poli, who must be made to speak by fair means or foul."

"But you will be with me, Nasone," I answered, for he had spoken as though we were to part presently. To this he made no reply, and keeping his keen glance in the direction of Corte, strode on in silence. Martin also spoke but little, and so, each engrossed in his own thoughts, we went steadily onward until the fortress of Corte came in sight, and soon after this we had descended the hills into the town, which was slumbering in the midday heat.

The market place was deserted, as we crossed



by it on our way to the notary's house, being directed thither by a yawning lad who lolled against the mud wall of a cottage at the entrance to Corte, and without much difficulty in finding our way came at length before a door at which Martin beat a tattoo with his sword hilt. Before he could well finish his summons the door flew open, and the woman whom I had seen last clutching the notary at Bastia, stood like a lioness defying its enemies.

Undaunted by the sight, however, Martin enquired whether the Signor were in the house, adding that we wished to see him upon important business.

The lioness gave a sort of snort, tossing her head and making her black locks writhe and twist like a nest of snakes.

"Signor Poli, forsooth," she cried. "Ay, he is within, and not likely to stir out, having work to do. What is your business with him?"

"King Theodore of Corsica requires Signor Poli's presence before him," I answered, stepping forward, "and I have the royal warrant for this."

"Then speak to Signor Poli yourselves," exclaimed the fury. "I know no King, nor ruler in Corsica. But give me your message, although I promise you that Signor Poli leaves not his house without my permission, King or no King."

"Gentle lady," answered Martin, making a bow, "if you will deign to lead the way to Signor Poli's room we will follow you. I am a simple sailor for



all my land-going dress, and therefore, as we say on shipboard, 'Heave ahead!'"

The woman stared at Martin, doubting whether to rail or smile I think, and without further parleying turned, jerking her sinewy hand to us to follow her, and we went softly to a room at the back of the house. There, as the fierce creature flung wide open the door, I saw the notary seated at a desk, with a mass of papers before him, and upon my advancing into the room he gave a smothered cry.

Now, although I was tempted to say many hard words to him, and who better than myself had cause to do so, I remembered that my one object was to carry Signor Poli before King Theodore, and to use the wretched man as the means for recovering my inheritance, so I restrained my anger, speaking as civilly as though the matter were one of simple business.

"You are surprised at the sight of me," I began, "and that is no strange thing when one considers the last time we met."

"I own that you have surprised me, good Sir," replied the notary, who held the quill with which he had been writing, between his teeth, with his eyes on the fierce figure of his housekeeper who stood in the doorway with her arms a-kimbo, watching us, "but nevertheless the sight of you does me infinite pleasure, for 'twas but yesterday that, speaking to your excellent kinsman, I said that a gallant young soldier—as you have proved yourself to my certain



knowledge these many times—a gallant young soldier as I observed, ran many dangers to himself——”

“Of being done to death by hired murderers, for instance,” remarked Martin coolly, whereat I saw the notary give a grip on the quill, as though his teeth chattered, and I heard as it were the woman hiss something under her breath.

“I am not here to discuss that point with you, Signor Poli,” I answered, “although doubtless you and my cousin have spoken to each other often about me. I have an order from King Theodore that you must appear before him to answer certain charges, and that at once.”

Signor Poli shrank down in his cushioned chair, and a look of terror came over his face.

“There is some vile conspiracy against me,” he whined, “I know the meaning of this appearing before the German who is called King of Corsica.”

“Who has been crowned King of Corsica,” I exclaimed, for the notary’s words angered me afresh, “by a lawful council of the state.”

“Yet I will not go before him,” cried he, taking a firm hold of the desk as though I were about to seize him. “I know Theodore’s justice and the quick following of his sentence. There was Napoleone, the money-lender of Citra to wit, who suffered agonies, through having to forego a lawful bargain, and Citrone the brigand—although I own him to have done a crime or two and therefore richly deserving



of punishment—who was fined a sum large enough to bring ruin on his family. Moreover——”

“Camilla,” interrupted Martin, turning away from the craven fellow, “how long are we to waste words in this fashion. It is time we returned to the camp,” and he moved toward Signor Poli who screamed.

“I have business with Signor Fabiani Brasco,” he cried, “who is coming here from a little way outside the town whither he has gone this morning. In a short time he will be at my house, and if he find me gone, what reliance can he or anyone else place on my promises!”

“Fabiani Brasco!” The name was repeated with a snarl by the woman who had stood regarding the notary. “It was Fabiani Brasco who carried you into Bastia, and he comes no more to this house. And to the King you shall go for punishment if you deserve it.”

She stepped forward, and taking the notary by the shoulders seemed to lift him from his chair—there was a scuffle in which the desk was overturned, and Signor Poli, trembling in every limb, was held out in the woman’s strong grasp to us.

“Take him,” she cried, shaking her snaky locks. “And see that he does not escape on the way.”

I was about to answer her, when a sudden noise, coming from the outside of the house, caused me to look round. Nasone had left us, I remembered his doing this as we had stood knocking for admittance,



and with a quick foreboding of evil I ran to the door.

At a distance of a few yards from the house were Emanuel Matra and my kinsman Fabiani, face to face, the latter holding his sword guarding his breast. Neither of them heeded those who for a breathless moment or two were the on-lookers to a struggle, so fierce and deadly that I can scarcely record its brief continuance, nor was I in time to hinder the mortal encounter from its termination. Nasone was armed with a stiletto, and springing forward reached Fabiani's throat. I saw my cousin reel, stumbling awkwardly by reason of his lameness, and at the same instant his sword point was deep in Nasone's side. I saw the blood spurt from the wound, sprinkling the white dust of the road, and there was a little space between the two men for a second. Then Nasone had closed upon his enemy—there was the sharp rise and fall of the crimsoned stiletto twice—the shrill cry that rings yet in my ear, and with his face in the dust Nasone fell beside the quivering form of Fabiani Brasco.

It had happened with the rapidity of a lightning flash, and I was kneeling beside the still body of the man who had wronged me so deeply, his glazed eyes resting in an angry glare on me. He tried to utter a word, yet no sound came from his lips, but with the movement of them was the death rattle in his throat. I looked down on his dead face, forgetful of aught but the sudden fate which had overtaken him, and then the eager crowd who had



gathered to the spot forced me from the corpse.

Nasone had been lifted and was being carried into the house. "He was yet alive," I heard somebody say, and I followed the men who were holding his body. Upon a bed hastily brought from an upper room he was gently laid, but all that skill could do, was powerless to stay the ebbing life.

Around the bed we watched him slowly dying, and it was almost at the last before he spoke. I stooped down to catch his feeble words, which were a message to Cesario, and then a sudden strength seemed to come.

"I am revenged," he cried, "I have waited long for it. Fabiani killed the only thing I ever loved—his blood has been shed, as was my faithful dog's blood shed, I am revenged at last."

It was ended, that long-cherished vengeance—ended as many another Corsican revenge had ended in the past, and Fabiani Brasco, unrepentant, unpitied, and evil to the last, was buried, after the formal and scanty record of the affair had been taken down by the chief of the *shirri* in Corte. Crime and murder were, alas! but only too rife in Corsica at that period, for the duel to cause much enquiry or interest, Emanuel Matra was laid beneath the turf, beside his enemy, and when the duties connected with the burials were performed, Martin and I quitted Corte, taking Signor Poli in our watchful keeping. He had lost every shred of courage and bombast, that he had shown at first,



vowing to make amends for all the wrongs done me by my cousin Fabiani Brasco, yet to his promises I gave little heed, cheering myself the rather with those given me by his Majesty King Theodore.



## CHAPTER XXXIX.

### THE GATHERING STORM.

**D**URING our absence, the order had been given to raise the siege of Bastia, the attempt to capture the town being abandoned. There had been desertions from King Theodore's army, councils were divided, and day by day the disaffection grew greater. The King had retired to Cervione, vainly trusting to restore confidence among those to whom he owed his kingship, and thither we followed him. I saw nothing of either Serafino nor Cesario, although I never doubted their loyalty, and hoped to meet them later on. Martin and I with the notary went to Cervione.

There was a council being held at the palace when we arrived, and having left Signor Poli safe under Martin's keeping I waited impatiently until the members of the council had dispersed. The palace wore a forlorn look, and the busy life which had pervaded its little rooms and passages was replaced by a mournful quietude. There was no longer a guard maintained, nor even a sentry to be seen, whilst those whom I chanced to encounter



about the building went with a pre-occupied air upon their business, giving little heed to anyone who might chose to come or go.

I gained an audience with King Theodore after a trifling delay, finding him more depressed and thoughtful than when I had been last in his presence. The trappings and gew-gaws of his royalty were there truly, his dress and appearance—other than that of his anxious face—were the same, but the change from the former gaiety of the palace to its present dullness, was a sign of coming evil.

His eyes lighted as his glance rested on me. "Yours is a more welcome face than many I have seen this day," he exclaimed, "for distrust and sullenness were upon those of every man of the council that has just ended, thanks be to the Saints."

"I should have been with your Majesty ere now," I answered, "but events detained me in Corte. My cousin Fabiani Brasco is dead."

"No great loss that, I take it," answered Theodore. "There were strange stories of him, yet not stranger than of many other men." And then he came near to me, putting his hand on my shoulder familiarly.

"Camilla Negroni," he said, trying to speak calmly, "I was minded to make my subjects happy and prosperous—to drive from Corsica the enemy who has so long oppressed your countrymen, and these things I would have done, had not deceit and opposition been used to hinder me. Yet I



will fulfil my destiny, Corsica shall rise amongst nations, and those who have proved faithless to their oath shall have reason to regret. Paoli, Raffaelli, Sistino and others—all left me, yet General Giafferi is faithful still. He and a few more, amongst whom are you, Camilla, I place my confidence in.”

He was strongly agitated whilst saying this, and it was plainly to be seen that the trials and difficulties surrounding him were wellnigh insupportable. I remembered how much good he had done since he had been our king, the victories he had gained, for the Genoese had been driven to their coast strongholds, leaving the interior of the island free from their iron rule, and yet it had been all without result to himself. Of money, he told me, he had not enough to pay the small wages of his servants, whilst hardships and scanty provisions were the rule within the palace. Without were discontent and secret plottings, but so great was King Theodore's confidence, and so strong his hope, that as yet he did not despair.

“When the fleet appears,” he cried, “all these black clouds that overshadow me will vanish.”

Alas! that fleet, which existed, like a good many other things, only in King Theodore's imagination—was never to appear, and the fatal day was swiftly coming which should have seen the appearance of the hoped-for ships. However, there was a little time yet in which King Theodore reigned supreme, and exercised his royal prerogative of administering



justice between his Corsican subjects. And fortunate indeed was it for me that he could do this, as otherwise the inheritance bequeathed me by my father would have been seized and held by hands as covetous and thieving as my cousin Fabiani Brasco's.

Signor Poli made a clean breast of the whole matter, using as much care and diligence in restoring as he had exercised in withholding my moneys from me. And whether it was the dread of meeting such a fate as had befallen Fabiani, or the fear of the King's anger (which was no slight thing when aroused by stories of robbery and wrong-doing) I cannot say, yet so prompt and energetic was the notary in carrying out the behests of my father's will, that within a week of my bringing him to Cervione, the account of my estate had been prepared.

Upon Martin's advice I sold everything it was possible to find a purchaser for, and in this business Signor Poli proved of the greatest service. I discovered, however, that he had made an excellent profit for himself by the various dealings, and when it was too late to repair the wrong, that the notary had cheated one of the buyers shamefully. He was so keen and cunning that I only heard of his trickery by chance, and then he and his victim were separated from me by an expanse of sea and land. The proceeds of my estate I entrusted to the keeping of King Theodore, fearing to have so much gold in my own charge, and the end of this part of my story is, that my money was safely



delivered to me when the time came for my bidding the King farewell.

Of my cousin Teodor I had seen nothing since he testified against Cesario Arrighi and myself, before the governor of Bastia. Nor had Martin further encountered him, and neither of us regretted this overmuch, as will be readily believed. Where he had gone, or what his plans might be, we gave no thought to, having many other things to occupy our minds at that time.

Especially Martin Chicheley's, for he had received intelligence of Signor Vico's death, and without delay had set off for the house wherein Lucia and Dame Ursulo were left in their desolation. There was a bright gleam in Martin's eyes, the look of determination I had so often noticed when his resolution had been formed to do something decisive.

"You will soon see me again, Camilla," he said, as I bade him adieu, "the time is coming for my returning to England, but I shall not travel alone."

I wondered at his saying this, for it was scarcely required. He and I had decided upon leaving Corsica together when the chance of doing so came.

"I am longing to see my home again," he cried, "and those whom I love. They will have given me up for lost long ago, I am afraid, but that shall only make our meeting the more joyful."

"Yet it will be sad to part from your friends in Corsica," I said, having a meaning which he guessed, I think, for he turned crimson.



"Not so sad either," he laughed, "seeing that I shall take some along with me into Staffordshire. But that need not be discussed now—when I return it will be time enough. If I do not do so in three days, Camilla, come you to Dame Ursulo's house. One never knows what may happen."

Martin departed in the direction of Ajaccio, and I returned to the palace, meeting Signor Poli in one of the garden walks, looking gloomier than ever. We had finished our business and I was puzzled to account for his remaining in Cervione.

"You will be expected at Coste," I said, "your errand is done here, Signor Poli."

"Yet I would fain remain with the King," he replied, rubbing his thin chin. "I am, in a sense, at my ease in Cervione. There is the dismal prospect of my aged housekeeper before me—her fierceness and tyranny which I detest—why should I be thus treated?" and he asked this question with a shrillness that made me laugh.

"I am truthfully informed that Massoni is well again from his wounds," he continued, "and if he chance to meet me—Oh worthy, gallant young Sir, only think of a dagger being between your ribs—it may be my case. No, no. I will stay at Cervione, though I am put to mending the roads for my sustenance."

"Maybe your services will be further needed as a notary," I answered lightly, little thinking how soon and how greatly those services would be



required; for next day a letter came to me from Martin, stating that Signor Rota, the tax-gatherer of Ajaccio, had made his appearance at the house of Dame Ursulo, with a claim she could neither understand nor satisfy.

I hastened to find Signor Poli, and to him I explained the matter as far as I myself understood it.

"I will proceed forthwith and investigate this affair," he exclaimed. "An honest way of earning some money is open to me. Pshaw—Rota, a mere gatherer of taxes—a scoundrel moreover—ay ay, I will quickly bring him to his senses, for this affair savours very much of extortion, a thing I abhor. Will you journey with me, Signor Negroni?"

I shook my head. "I will come to-morrow," I answered. "The King requires my presence to-day, for there is to be a diet held at Sartene, and I go thither in his suite."



## CHAPTER XL.

### AN UNEXPECTED TEMPEST.

THE council to which I accompanied King Theodore of Corsica, that was to prove the turning point in his life and mine, was held in the largest house in Sartene, and thither had assembled the chief men in Corsica, whose dark faces wore a gloomy look as the King entered to them. There was a time when a cheer would have greeted his appearing, but now an ominous silence prevailed as he took his seat beneath the canopy erected over his chair of state. Theodore was arrayed in his faded finery, and yet, although this seemed to betoken the waning of his royalty and power, he looked and spoke with such manliness and confidence that by and by the sour faces of the council lost their gloominess, and each word he spoke was listened to with rapt attention.

First King Theodore spoke of what he had already achieved; of the deeds of his brave army and the valour of his generals—mentioning these each by name, and each was cheered by the listeners—of the victories won and the defeat of Corsica's



oppressors. Moreover he recounted the more peaceful results of his short reign, the industries he had created and the benefits these had brought with them—things that not even his bitterest enemies could question or gainsay.

I can see the King's face before me now, the quick brightness of it as he grew eloquent, and although his royalty was but a tinselled show, and was ready to vanish like a bubble, his glowing words and impassioned gestures made them real to me for the time being. I recalled to mind the great service he had done me, and the friendship he had always shown; these memories mingled with anger against the ingratitude those who had received his benefits exhibited toward him in his hour of trial.

Presently the King came to that part of his speech which dealt with his promise of the coming fleet. There were yet some days before the date at which this should appear, and the assurance of this was repeated, amid a cheer from the assembled council, led by General Giafferi whose loyalty to King Theodore had never wavered.

But the malcontents were too many to be silenced for long, and one of those, Count Istrias of Omani, made a speech violently impugning the King's actions. Yet even this served a useful purpose, for it involved a dispute and argument, at which the fierce, headstrong Corsicans were no match for the cool, calculating and experienced



German. He opposed their raileries with gentleness, disarming their wrath, and turning the feelings of the council in sympathy towards himself, and after a long sitting the assembly broke up.

To this diet which he had summoned, his Majesty explained that his intention was to leave the island for a time in order to hasten the arrival of the fleet, and during his absence the government was to be carried on by a regency of three of his most prominent supporters.

It was when the King and I were alone that he informed me of his full purpose, and it were as though he had removed a mask, for I saw and heard his natural face and voice.

"I have foreseen the gathering of a storm," he said, half laughingly, "and I am too worldly wise to abide its breaking—that would be madness, and therefore I have for some time prepared my arrangements. A ship sailing under the ensign of the king of France will be off Aleria ere the week is ended, and in her I shall quit Corsica. Yet only for a time, as I told the council, for I will return hither, with a fleet more richly laden, and with a greater abundance of stores than that in which I came to my kingdom. I will wreak vengeance on those who have doubted and deserted me, and bow their proud necks before my throne. Like a king I came, and as becomes a king I will embark—there is to be no secrecy, but escorted by the nobles I have created, and the people I have rescued



from the yoke of the oppressor I shall depart."

A thousand wild thoughts flashed across my mind as Theodore told me this, and as though reading them he suddenly became serious.

"I offer you a passage in my ship, Camilla," he said, "and my advice is that you accept the opportunity of quitting Corsica."

"I cannot do so without Martin Chicheley goes with me, Sire," I answered.

"There will be room enough for half a dozen passengers, and these may be of your own choosing, Camilla," he laughed. "There is a tempest close at hand, or I am no reader of the signs of the time, and you and your friends had best follow my example of escaping from its fury."

The royal chamberlain came into the room as the King spoke. Putting on his regal air the monarch of Corsica gave an order or two as pompously as the King of France might have done, and when the chamberlain had bowed himself out of the room Theodore turned to me again.

"I will be King to the last," he exclaimed, "but my sceptre is shaking to its fall. I see this—I see my danger and yours, Camilla. Hasten to your friends, and make speed to depart with me."

"But the fleet that you have promised, Sire," I answered, "it may arrive during your absence."

"I shall be surprised if it do," he replied; "but we will speak no more of this same fleet, although I have created greater wonders than that, before



now." Then we were interrupted again, and nothing hindering me further, I started to join Martin Chicheley at Dame Ursulo's.

I had come within a short distance of a white cottage which from Martin's description I knew to be the dwelling-place of the widow and Lucia, and was hastening forward, when Martin himself met me; and there was a grim look in his face.

"How have you fared?" I enquired eagerly. "Has Signor Rota departed or does he still plague the poor folks yonder? I sent the notary to you."

"Yes, the notary came safely, and it is a case such as we in England call, 'setting a thief to catch a thief,' but between Poli and Rota, Dame Ursulo will certainly lose every piece of money her husband left her, unless we prevent it."

"Is this claim which Fabiani Brasco had upon the farmer a good one, think you, Martin?" I asked.

"Signor Rota vows that it is, and that Teodor Brasco will enforce it, now that his father is dead," answered he; "but as to the rights of it, or the wrongs of it, I cannot find out, nor even what the claim is. We have thrown the tax-gatherer out of the house, however, and he is now with two assistants, watching for the opportunity of getting in again."

"And what of Teodor?" I enquired. "Have you seen him?"

"Ay, Teodor and I have met again," replied Martin carelessly. "There is no longer any quarrel



between us—it is all settled. He drew upon me somewhat unexpectedly, and I was compelled to chastise him—English fashion. You know what that is. You must understand that I have no particular desire to be killed at present, nor to kill. They say that Teodor is an excellent fencer, so I broke his sword over my knee and——”

Martin stopped speaking suddenly, for there came the sounds of a desperate fray in the direction of the cottage, and we ran forward. The noise proceeded from the side hidden from our sight, but as we reached the spot we speedily discovered the cause of the uproar.

Mounted on a three-legged stool was the figure of the tax-gatherer, held in the grip of Signor Poli who hung half within and half without a window; and in these positions each maintained his share in the liveliest battle I had ever yet witnessed. Signor Rota's wig had been seized from his head, and with this the notary was belabouring his opponent vigorously, around whom was a halo of hair powder. Now and then the tax-gatherer was lifted from his foothold on the stool, shouting the while for the aid of his two companions, who were, however, not visible; and each time the notary jerked his foe upward, it was with a kind of triumphant war-cry. Thief, miscreant, and villain were the mildest epithets he employed, Signor Rota replying with an upward thrust of an ugly-looking knife which had already inflicted a scratch on the notary's skinny arms, the



blood from which had crimsoned the tax-gatherer's bald skull. How long the fray had lasted, or how soon it would have ended will never be known, for just as Signor Rota had been lifted once again from the stool, the notary overbalanced himself, and the two infuriated men fell together, fluttering and fighting, like two fowls in the dust.

Martin ran near and seizing the notary, dragged him from his prey, and I did the same to Signor Rota, and we held them apart. But the fury and vehemence of the two men cannot easily be described, and the whole strength of Martin was required to carry Signor Poli from the scene of battle. Never had that cunning gentleman fought so valiantly before, nor had I given the tax-gatherer credit for so much courage as he professed, whilst I was holding his wriggling body back from his antagonist. I think he recognised me, for he spluttered out a volume of words in which were references to Nasone, Ajaccio, and the damage done to a new cloak of his when last we had met.

"Keep your bird out of the house," cried Martin, as he carried the notary bodily off. "We shall never settle the business else," and this I did, although the enraged little fellow swore to have my life a dozen times over.

Martin, having locked the house door on Signor Poli, came back to us, and we spoke soothingly to the tax-gatherer, who could do no less than hear.

"You are a very troublesome fellow," Martin began



in a calm, pleasant voice, "but have no claim upon the hospitality of this house. Yet what is just and right Dame Vico will pay, and it is to know what sum this should be that we have employed the services of a notary."

"Who is prepared to maintain the quarrel, with rapier, broadsword, club, axe, or pistol, or any other weapon known. At ten paces, or closer, indoors or under the open sky I am ready to meet any stony-hearted tax-gatherer between the four corners of the island of Corsica," and Signor Poli's head was thrust out from the window like a Punchinello's, as he yelled out his challenge.

"Yet not before this business is out of hand," laughed Martin. "After that is done with, you and Signor Rota are welcome to slaughter each other if your courage does not fail you both."

"You are a villain," screamed the tax-gatherer, looking eagerly in every direction for his missing wig. "Where is the peruke you have stolen from off my head, as you would steal anything your knavish hands can touch."

It was lying in the dust, very much trampled upon, and I lifted it carefully.

"That service is in return for a kindness you did me once, Signor Rota," I said, giving him the dishevelled head gear. "You may remember the barriers of Ajaccio and your adroit manner of passing one through them."

"For which I promise to make you pay," retorted



the tax-gatherer. "The law—through me—has been outraged, and you shall be laid by the heels—both of you, together with that grinning scrivener, whose blood I will have if there is law left in the country."

Signor Poli sent up a jeering cry, and as by this time the deadliest part of the storm was over, we let the tax-gatherer on the field of battle, and going into the house, began at once upon the serious business of releasing Dame Ursulo from the clutches of Signor Rota's law.

It was but a small sum due by her, and this with Martin's approval I made myself surety for, the notary, having money with him, paying it at my request. This he did through the window to Signor Rota, who handed a written paper in acknowledgment of the payment by the same opening, and I think it was the chink of the coins which soothed them both sufficiently to allow the transaction to be completed without further abuse of each other. When Signor Rota had gone trotting down the road in the direction of Ajaccio, the notary explained the reason for the quarrel.

"The miscreant was for forcing his way into the house by means of a milking stool, and this being a process unknown to the law, I resented the unlawful attempt, as you beheld."

"It was bravely done," cried Martin. "I did not believe you owned such valour, Signor Poli."

"I have suppressed my courage for years," re-



plied the notary. "I have the best reasons for so doing. Inwardly I am filled with courage, and my outward appearance is but a subterfuge as it may be termed. I have the heart of a lion, combined with——"

"With a very clever tongue," retorted Martin. "Say no more about your courage, man, as there is little time to listen to it. Finish the clearing up of Dame Ursulo's business affairs, for I sail to England by the first ship leaving Corsica, and with me go the Dame and her granddaughter Lucia."



## CHAPTER XLI.

### THE GOING OF THEODORE.

**I**N a few words, taking Martin aside, for I feared to let Signor Poli hear me, I told him the proposal which the King had made to me, and how happily the opportunity of regaining his native country had come to my companion, will be easily understood when I state that he had persuaded Dame Ursulo and her granddaughter to leave Corsica, for Lucia and Martin were lovers now, and were to be married as soon as Martin had returned home.

The business upon which he had employed the services of the notary was ended satisfactorily and nothing remained to prevent us proceeding to Aleria, whither the King had directed me to await his arrival; and so it was that a few days after the scene I have described in the previous chapter Martin with Lucia, and I with Dame Ursulo, came to Aleria, where I procured a lodging for them, until the King's departure.

It was a week after the assembly of the diet at Sartene, and half a mile off shore lay the ship at anchor with the ensign of France flying, and in the town a great crowd of spectators had gathered. It



was a larger gathering than had witnessed Theodore's coming even, and in the sloping street, along the shore, and at every window from whence a glimpse of the show which accompanied the King's departure could be seen, were eager on-lookers. Flags waved and gay hangings decorated the house past which the *cortége* would go, and a troop of soldiers lined the street down to the water's edge, where lay a boat, having a gay canopy erected at the stern.

It was midday before the sounds of music, coming nearer and nearer, heralded the King's approach, and the tap-tap of the elfish drummer could be distinguished (I am disposed to think that little fellow was in reality an imp, for he came and went mysteriously, and no cunning nor order could silence his drum). And then, riding gallantly at the head of a picked body of his soldiers, surrounded by courtiers and officials innumerable, the King appeared, clothed magnificently, bowing graciously to those whom he called his subjects. General Giafferi was at his right hand, the King now and again speaking to him with a smile on his face, as though the day were one of his Majesty's greatest triumphs.

Down the steep street, greeted on either hand by the excited crowd, rode King Theodore, glittering in gold and jewels—the band of musicians playing a war march, and headed by the dwarfish drummer. Down to the shore came the brilliant procession, and here did the King deliver a noble farewell to his assembled lieges. Words that seemed



to reach every heart, brave words, and further promises. He was to return shortly—their long-borne sufferings were to vanish before the glory of the time to come, and a great deal more of the like sort he said. And when his speech was ended King Theodore stepped beneath the gilded canopy, standing erect there as the boat conveyed him to the ship. With him went Count Costa, the royal chamberlain, and a few others of his officers; and when these had been received on board a boat was sent to carry Martin and myself together with our two companions to the French ship. Before evening the shores of Corsica were fading from my sight, and if some natural regret at leaving my native country were in my mind, the companionship of my true friends very speedily reconciled me to my new position. If I except one circumstance, which was the pursuit of our ship by a Genoese cruiser, which, however, was desisted from upon our showing the flag of the King of France, the voyage from Corsica to Leghorn was uneventful. We disembarked here, after King Theodore and his suite had first gone ashore, and here it was that I parted from him.

The King had left the ship without any further display of his royalty, and gone to an hotel in Leghorn, which was situated in a quiet street, passing as a plain gentleman. He had told me the name of this hotel, during the voyage, and thither I went after our party was safely housed.

I started in surprise upon entering the room



occupied by his Majesty, for there before me, instead of a gaudily arrayed king whom I remembered, stood a stout figure, dressed as an *abbé*. He was alone, and as I remained a moment, gazing in surprise at him, Theodore came to me, holding out his hand.

"You scarcely knew me in this guise," he said, "and those amongst whom I am about to mingle will of a surety not recognise King Theodore of Corsica in the staid cleric I have become, as you see, Camilla."

"I should have passed you in the street as a stranger, Sire," I exclaimed. "Who would have recognised you, I wonder, as an *abbé*?"

"It becomes me then—this dress?" he answered, twisting himself round before a mirror, and we burst into a laugh together. "Yes, I am as much at my ease as a churchman, nay, a great deal more so, Camilla, than ever I was as ruler of Corsica; but the change is only for a time and purpose. I shall return to my subjects, ten times more powerful than I left them, and Europe is to ring yet with my greatness and glory."

I made no answer, although I devoutly hoped King Theodore's prophecy might be fulfilled, and the next instant he proceeded to hand over to me the money I had entrusted to his keeping.

"You have a perilous journey before you," he told me, "and must guard your treasure with watchfulness. You and Martin Chicheley are to travel to England, he says. England—humph! who knows but what I myself may also go to England. None of us can see the path before us for very far, nor the



turnings we must each take into the unknown. If my path lead me to England, mayhap you and I may meet again, Camilla Negroni," and he smiled pleasantly.

We talked for some little time longer, and then I shook hands with Theodore of Corsica with a warmth our parting warranted, whilst later in the day his Majesty, leaving his royal chamberlain and officers of state behind him, departed from Leghorn, on his way to Rome and Florence.

Of the journey which Martin Chicheley, Dame Ursulo Vico, Lucia, and I, made together through France and onward to Martin's home in England, I will say but little. The strangeness of the scenes, the many diverting incidents and little adventures by the way, served to make the journey pleasing, and to shorten its length to us. Remembering the King's advice, Martin and I guarded my money so carefully that it was never in danger of being lost, although England had its brigands no less than has my native country Corsica. There were rumours of highwaymen, as the English call their brigands, who would have murdered me cheerfully for less money than I carried, but from these we were happily preserved. We came into that part of England, which is called Staffordshire, and Martin's returning was the cause of such rejoicing that this story would need to be unduly lengthened were I to record the scene, and then I was welcomed to his home and family with a friendliness I shall never forget.

Many years have passed since that eventful day, Martin and Lucia have long been married, Dame



Ursulo rests in peace beneath the shadow of a village church, and Martin has left the sea, becoming a portly squire, generous-hearted as of old and rich even for an Englishman. By his father's advice I used my money in trading as a merchant, and have prospered beyond my greatest hopes.

Of my old friends left in Corsica some are yet alive, but Serafino and Cesario are both dead. They fell as they had lived, in the service of their country, being killed in a battle against the Genoese. These things I learnt from the notary of Corte, and although I mistrusted every deed or word almost of his, I was fain to believe the message conveyed in his letter. He wrote with a cheerfulness quite remarkable, and it was not until I came to the postscript that I understood the cause for this was the death of that fierce tyrant, his housekeeper. He told me, moreover, that my cousin Teodor had departed from Corsica soon after Fabiani Brasco's death, but whither Teodor had gone none knew. As to the tax-gatherer of Ajaccio, Signor Poli spoke of an approaching combat with him, writing this item so vain-gloriously, however, that I chose to doubt the truth of the statement.

Of the many personages I have referred to in my story, and with whom I chanced to come into contact, history can tell these better than I, but of the principal actor in the drama something yet remains to be told, and of my many adventures, the last one I will narrate has always seemed the most wonderful and unexpected.



## CHAPTER XLII.

### THE PHANTOM FADES AT LAST.

**I**T was some years since coming to England with Martin Chicheley that my business led me past the black, frowning walls of a debtor's prison in London—a place of such horrors that no dungeon in Corsica could show anything more dreadful. It was a sight, however, with which my long sojourn in London had made me familiar, and I went along, immersed in the thoughts of a lucrative bargain I had just made, yet strangely enough the memory of my early days seemed to mingle with those thoughts, memories of snow-tipped mountains and my wild life amongst them in far-away Corsica, I was walking thus when I heard my name called in a voice which brought the hot blood to my cheeks and set my heart beating wildly. “Camilla Negroni!” the voice cried again in a plaintive tone, and glancing in the direction whence it proceeded, I beheld the wan face of the man behind the barred window of the debtor's prison, whom I had known as “Theodore, King of Corsica.”

Now it is the easiest work possible to get be-



hind the walls of a prison and therefore it was that before many moments had elapsed I was seated opposite this poor debtor, listening to his mournful story. He had returned to the coasts of Corsica, he told me, after traversing the greater part of Europe, raising money, enlisting Poles and Germans under his banner, and escaping by another of his miracles from an Amsterdam prison into which his creditors had cast him. More than one ship, full laden with stores of war, had he dispatched to Corsica, together with proclamations from him, their King, exhorting his subjects to steadfastness.

It was a long, long story that this extraordinary man told me, which seemed more like a romance than sober truth. Fate had crushed him. Repulsed by his former subjects, who had appealed to France for help, with a price set on his head by the senate of Genoa, harassed by debts, and dogged at every step by the emissaries of his enemies, Theodore, Baron of Neuhoff, came at last to that turning in his life's path, which he had spoken of to me long ago when he and I parted at Leghorn, and the turning was in the direction of England. Hither misfortunes pursued him, and having exhausted all his resources, prison walls shut him out from the outer world in which he had wandered so long and lived his short life as a monarch of Corsica. So poor was he now, that the sum of money I gave him seemed a fortune to his hungry eyes, but to



release him from prison was beyond my means. It required a greater power than mine to deal with his creditors, but this power was found in the person of an English statesman.

King Theodore—he never relinquished that dignity—did not long survive his release from prison, nor enjoy the modest income provided him by the great man to whom he owed his freedom. To his creditors Theodore made over his kingdom as security for his debts, cherishing the phantom of his royalty to the last. I saw much of him during the closing months of his adventurous life, and Martin Chicheley smoothed many a little trouble away from the fallen man.

The King died peacefully in the year seventeen hundred and fifty-six, and those of my readers who choose to search, may read upon a monument in the church of Saint Ann in Westminster his epitaph and the record of his vicissitudinous career.

THE END.















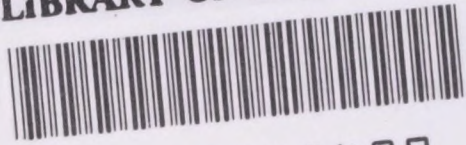








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